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# Mapping Cultural Policies in **S**mall **I**sland **D**eveloping **S**tates

*Amplifying SIDS voices in the global policy dialogue  
on culture and sustainable development*



2024

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# Short summary

## Mapping Cultural Policies in Small Island Developing States

Spanning three sub-regions – the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS), the Caribbean, and the Pacific – the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) represent 39 UNESCO Member States and 9 Associate Members. Countries and regional organizations have increasingly demonstrated their commitment in the context of fast-evolving policy landscape and cultural ecosystems, encompassing the different dimensions of culture through its diversity and a wide spectrum of concerned stakeholders. Today, a SIDS-specific, culture-led development vision is on the rise.

Culture has a multifaceted impact on sustainable development pathways of the SIDS, from climate action, biodiversity protection and food security to economic diversification, social inclusion, gender equality or urban sustainability. The voices and aspirations of SIDS must be heard in the global policy dialogue, in acknowledgement of their priorities, opportunities and insights. International cooperation efforts by UNESCO and other organizations are also essential in identifying areas for future policy investment and adaptation at the national and regional levels.

Following the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022, SIDS are championing culture for sustainable development towards the adoption of a new Programme of Action, the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS 2024-2034.

Over  
**2/3 of SIDS**  
have a national  
public policy or a  
strategy  
in place for culture



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*“Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed.”*



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# **Mapping Cultural Policies in Small Island Developing States**

*Amplifying SIDS voices in the global policy dialogue  
on culture and sustainable development*



## FOREWORD

by Ernesto Ottone R.

Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO

In the vast expanse of our oceans and seas lie the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), home to a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and biodiversity. These islands across the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, South China Sea, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, possess unique development narratives notably shaped by migration and the stewardship of diverse Indigenous communities.

Alongside their natural assets, SIDS face distinct challenges due to their geographical remoteness and vulnerability to external shocks, particularly the impacts of a changing climate. Rising sea levels and the intensification of extreme weather events threaten these island nations, underscoring the urgent need for action.

Amid these challenges, culture stands as a beacon of resilience and adaptation for SIDS. Recognizing its pivotal role, SIDS are upscaling the integration of culture within their policy agendas at both sub-regional and regional levels to strengthen the ownership of sustainable development pathways, while also aspiring to inform meaningfully the global policy dialogue on culture and sustainable development, bringing their unique expertise and vision.

Over the years, SIDS have harnessed UNESCO Culture Conventions as instruments to preserve and promote culture across all its dimensions and have progressively strengthened their cultural policy frameworks and integrated culture into broader policy frameworks. Such efforts provided critical avenues for a culture-led international cooperation and effective multilateralism, essential for advancing sustainable development ownership in SIDS.

However, despite these promising advances, systemic challenges persist. SIDS grapple with issues such as persisting inequalities particularly affecting youth and women, digital divide, and exogenous, unsustainable economic models. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of SIDS' cultural policies and strategic sustainable development priorities.

As we move towards the forthcoming adoption of the new Programme of Action 2024-2034 for SIDS, in May 2024, in Antigua and Barbuda, innovative approaches are needed to empower their development with culture at the forefront, notably investing in human capital and supporting economic diversification.

UNESCO remains committed to supporting SIDS in their cultural policy development and adaptation endeavours. We strive to shape a resilient cultural sector that addresses the priorities of SIDS and elevates their voices within sustainable development prospects.

This mapping of cultural policies in SIDS aims to shed light on the intersection of culture and sustainable development. By amplifying SIDS' voices and perspectives, we can build a more inclusive and effective global policy dialogue on culture for sustainable development towards anchoring culture within the Pact for the Future and the post-2030 agenda echoing the commitment taken at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development - MONDIACULT 2022.

Together with SIDS, let us leverage the power of culture to ensure a brighter future for all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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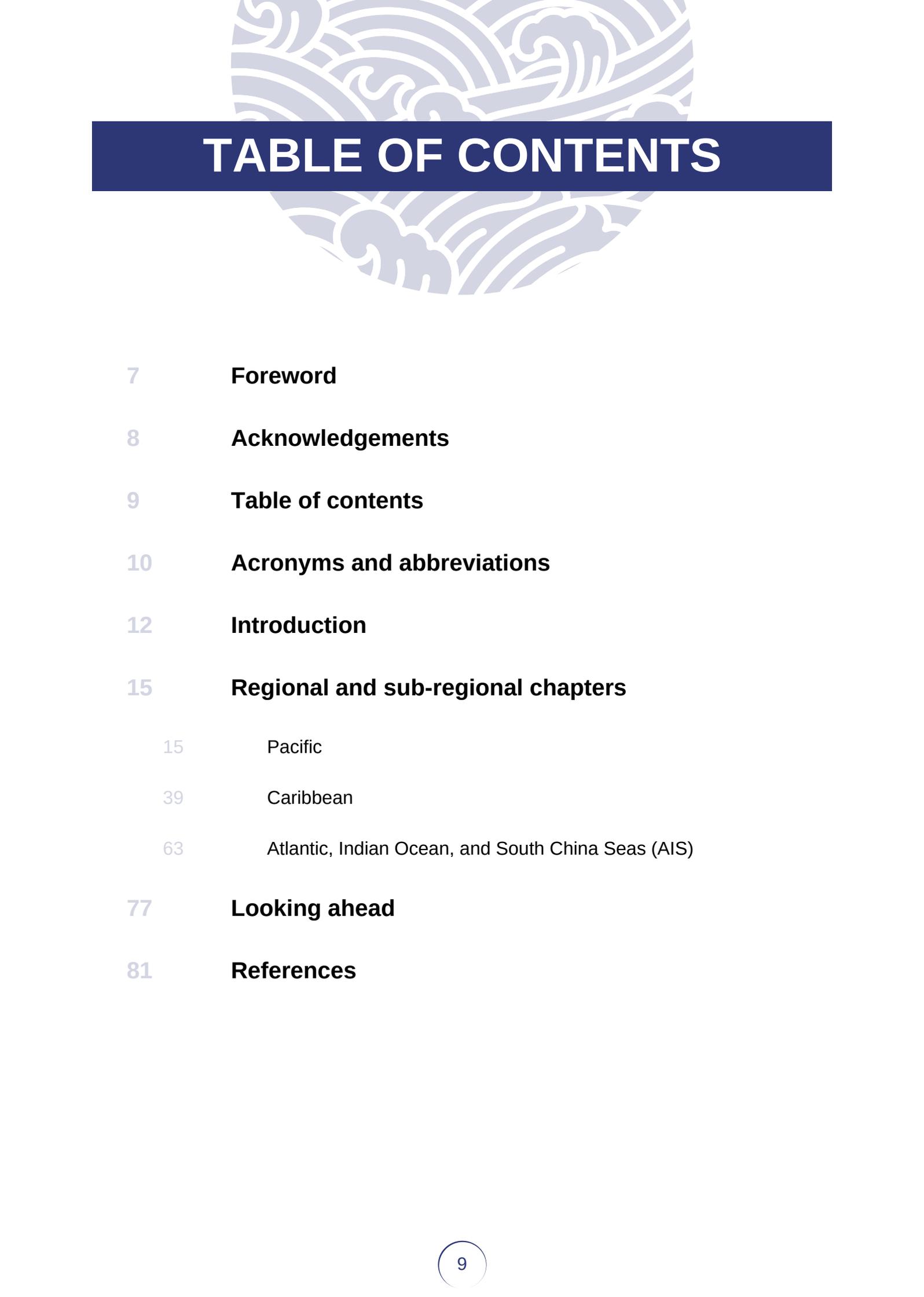
Finally, we wish to extend our special thanks to all the colleagues and collaborators who ensured the copy-editing and proofreading of the texts of the present publication. Many collaborators, within and outside UNESCO, were involved in the translation and production of the publication and we would like to thank them all.



Pacific  
Community  
Communauté  
du Pacifique

*with the generous support of*





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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**ACP:** African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States

**ADB:** Asian Development Bank

**AfCFTA:** African Continental Free Trade Area

**AIS:** Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Seas

**AU:** African Union

**BPOA:** Barbados Programme of Action

**CARICOM:** Caribbean Community

**CARIFESTA:** Caribbean Festival of Arts

**CCAC Mavuna:** Centre for Artistic and Cultural Creation of Comoros

**CCBP:** Caribbean Capacity Building Programme

**CCIMU:** Caribbean Creative Industries Management Unit

**CDB:** Caribbean Development Bank

**CDEMA:** Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency

**CECC/SICA:** Educational and Cultural Coordination of the Central American Integration System

**CEDA:** Caribbean Expert Development Agency

**CIIF:** Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Fund

**COHSOD:** Council for Human and Social Development

**COTED:** Council for Trade and Economic Development

**CRNM:** Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery

**CSME:** CARICOM Single Market and Economy

**CSOs:** Civil Society Organisations

**CSTPF:** Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework

**CTO:** Caribbean Tourism Organization

**DRM:** Disaster Risk Management

**ECCAS:** Economic Community of Central African Countries

**ECLAC:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

**ECOWAS:** Economic Community of West African States

**FestPAC:** Festival of Pacific Arts

**FTYIP:** First-ten Year Implementation Plan

**GDP:** Gross Domestic Product

**ICEC:** International Creative Exchange Caribbean

**IDIL:** Indigenous Languages Decade

**ILO:** International Labor Organization

**IMF:** International Monetary Fund

**IOC:** Indian Ocean Commission

**ITU:** International Telecommunication Union

**IUCN:** International Union for Conservation of Nature

**LDC:** Least Developed Country

**LINKS:** UNESCO Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems programme

**MSMEs:** Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization  
**OECS:** Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States  
**PIFS:** Pacific Island Forum Secretariat  
**PRWHAP:** Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan  
**SAMOA Pathway:** Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action  
**SATIIM:** Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management  
**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals  
**SMEs:** Small and Medium Enterprises  
**SPC:** Secretariat of the Pacific Community  
**SPREP:** Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program  
**SIDS:** Small Island Developing States  
**TK:** Traditional Knowledge  
**TVET:** Technical and Vocational Education and Training  
**UCLG:** United Cities and Local Governments  
**UN-OHRLLS:** United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States  
**UNDESA:** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme  
**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
**WIPO:** World Intellectual Property Organization  
**WTTC:** World Travel & Tourism Council



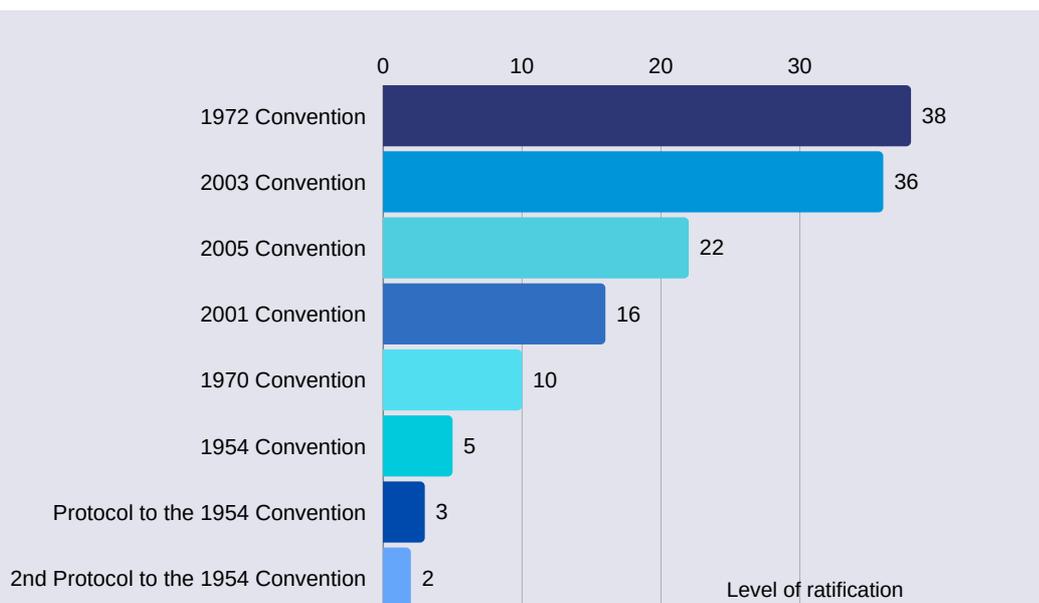
# Introduction

**Small Island Developing States (SIDS), spanning three sub-regions – the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, South China Sea (AIS); the Caribbean; and the Pacific – encompass a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and biodiversity.** These multicultural societies are intricately woven into the historical fabric of their peoples, shaped by migratory patterns and the diverse Indigenous communities that have long served as stewards of the land and sea. Their profound connections to both land and sea remain central to their identity and cultural heritage. The Asia and Pacific region has the highest proportion of Indigenous Peoples (70.5%), followed by Africa (16.3%), Latin America and the Caribbean (11.5%), Northern America (1.6%) and Europe and Central Asia (0.1%) (ILO, 2020). Culture has perennially occupied a central role in the adaptation of these island societies to their environment, cultivating well-being and resilience.

**Today, SIDS encompass 39 UNESCO Member States and 9 Associate Members, spanning more than 30% of the world's oceans and seas.** These countries share distinctive characteristics such as geographical remoteness and vulnerability to external shocks, including the multifaceted impacts of climate change, notably escalating sea levels and the heightened frequency and severity of extreme weather events. Moreover, they stand at the forefront of advancing climate action, recognizing the significant contributions that cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems can make to disaster risk reduction planning and resilience. Acknowledging the critical role of culture in their context, SIDS have scaled up policy dialogue, including at the sub-regional and regional levels, to address their development aspirations while tackling the interconnected imperatives of safeguarding cultural heritage and strengthening environmental sustainability.

**As early as 1994, the international community recognized the pivotal role of culture in the sustainable development of SIDS.** Culture was acknowledged as a fundamental dimension of the development paradigm in the first Programme of Action for SIDS, known as the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA), adopted the same year. A decade later, the Mauritius Strategy (2005) further elucidated that island culture and heritage, encompassing intangible cultural heritage, serve as vital conduits to sustainable development. In 2014, the Samoa Pathway (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action) urged the international community to bolster support for SIDS in enhancing heritage and creativity through four key priorities: i) Culture for sustainable development; ii) Cultural and natural heritage preservation; iii) Promotion of living heritage and cultural industries; and iv) Sustainable tourism development. The Samoa Pathway also underscored the significance of Indigenous bio-cultural heritage, recognizing the profound interconnections among people, culture, knowledge, and the natural environment, which can substantially further sustainable development objectives. Furthermore, it emphasized the imperative of fostering cross-sectoral public policy, advocating for the integration of culture with other policy domains to advance sustainable development at the local, national, and regional levels. As of today, these documents are regarded as sustainable development blueprints for SIDS, providing guidance for bolstering policy investments, notably in the realm of culture. This includes policies, strategies and initiatives focusing on heritage management, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, and facilitating training in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs).

**Over the past decades, there has been a notable increase in the number of SIDS ratifying UNESCO's Culture Conventions.** These conventions provide SIDS with vital instruments for preserving cultural diversity as a source of resilience and integrating culture into broader public policy frameworks. Nearly all SIDS have ratified the 1972 World Heritage Convention, with over 90% also ratifying the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, highlighting the paramount importance accorded to heritage across various dimensions. In 2019, Niue and Cabo Verde ratified the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, bringing the total to fifteen states. Moreover, slightly more than half of all SIDS are Parties to the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The ratification of the 1970 Convention on the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property remains low in the SIDS, with only 10 countries so far, despite the fact that they might be deeply affected by this scourge. These conventions equip SIDS with mechanisms to strengthen their policy frameworks across diverse cultural dimensions to protect and promote their cultural heritage and creative expressions, while also fostering international cooperation and offering opportunities for capacity building. UNESCO's ongoing efforts towards the global monitoring of Culture Conventions as well as the elaboration of a Global Report on Cultural Policies – in accordance with the 2022 MONDIACULT Declaration – will further contribute to strengthen and develop instruments and mechanisms for the integrated analysis, monitoring and measurement of culture and its impact on sustainable development.



### Ratification of UNESCO Culture Conventions among the 39 SIDS

#### List of the UNESCO Culture Conventions

- 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
- 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage
- 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
- 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
- Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
- Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
- 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention

**The UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 marked a turning point for global policy dialogue** and paved the way to shape a renewed vision on culture for sustainable development. The unanimous and historic adoption of the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration affirmed culture as a global public good and called for its inclusion as a stand-alone goal in the post-2030 international development agenda. Due recognition of the role of culture for sustainable development can help fill persistent gaps in the implementation of the 17 SDGs and provide an innovative shift that enables updated governance arrangements to deliver better public goods. The Declaration prominently features the role of Indigenous communities including towards enhanced enabling inclusive and participatory cultural policies, involving a multiplicity of actors. MONDIACULT also testified to a unique mobilization of the SIDS with the representation of sub-regional and regional integration organisations such as SPC and CARICOM.

**Without claiming to be exhaustive, this study provides an overview of the historic trajectory of cultural policies across the three sub-regions of SIDS and their growing connection to sustainable development prospects.** How does culture gradually intersect with other areas of development? In what ways does culture, encompassing tangible and intangible heritage as well as CCIs, foster inclusive development by empowering vulnerable groups, especially youth and women? How do Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems provide livelihoods and offer solutions to the challenges of a changing climate and biodiversity loss? What are the priorities within the cultural sector that hold potential for long-term impacts in SIDS? How does UNESCO, along with the international community, support SIDS in the development, revision, and adaptation of cultural policies? How can UNESCO's normative instruments and programmes contribute to shaping a resilient cultural sector while addressing the priorities of SIDS? These are among the issues that this study aims to explore, providing insights into the perspectives of SIDS, from a national, a sub-regional and a regional approach, regarding the many ways in which culture sustains development strategies in the long run. As the international community embarks on a new decade of action (2024-2034) in support of SIDS, this study aims to join forces at leveraging SIDS' voices and perspectives at the core of an inclusive and effective global policy dialogue on culture for sustainable development.



*The survival of small island developing states is firmly rooted in their human resources and cultural heritage, which are their most significant assets; those assets are under severe stress and all efforts must be taken to ensure the central position of people in the process of sustainable development.*

Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA), First paragraph, 1994



## Chapter I

# Cultural Policies in the Pacific SIDS

Deborah Kolb/Shutterstock.com\*

**Spanning a quarter of the globe over some 165 million km<sup>2</sup>, the Pacific SIDS form vast ocean States, with some 20,000 islands separated by vast stretches of open ocean.** Encompassing 15 UNESCO Member States and 2 Associated Members, the Pacific SIDS are home to 13.9 million people (UNDESA, 2022). The region hosts some of the world's land and ocean biodiversity hotspots, including 476 globally threatened species or 75% of known coral species (UN-OHRLLS, 2017). While levels of development vary greatly, 25% of the population is estimated to live in poverty (UNDESA, 2019). High levels of youth unemployment rates – an estimated 17.75% for youth, as opposed to 6.71% for the general population (ILO, Harmonized Microdata [1]) – lead to increasing numbers of young people migrating to Australia, New Zealand or other regions, often searching for seasonal work, thus creating significant skills gaps. Geographic isolation and remoteness are characteristic of the region and raise specific development and governance challenges. Small size, high import reliance, narrow resource and export base, and technological challenges, lead to high exposure to global shocks (ADB, 2021). Climate change is an existential threat to Pacific SIDS, who are among the most impacted by its adverse impacts including cyclone and typhoons, droughts, sea water temperature increase, sea-level rise, ocean acidification or changes in rainfall patterns.

[1]. Average estimated figure covering the following 11 countries: Australia, Fiji, Guam, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Samoa.

**The geography of the Pacific islands and the history of settlement, shaped by mobility and cross-cultural exchanges have carved distinctive cultural features.** The region has historically been divided into three geocultural subregions – Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia – although throughout history Pacific Islanders have voyaged, settled and interacted across these boundaries. Culture is integrated into almost every aspect of daily life with the close linkages between people and their environment shaping a uniquely Pacific way of life. The Pacific Islands are home to a diverse range of indigenous peoples, speaking 19% of the world's estimated 5,000 languages and often forming the majority of the population (United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues, 2015) In Kiribati, for example, 96.2% of the population is indigenous I-Kiribati according to the 2015 census (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Indigenous systems of knowledge and land tenure, which shape the islands landscapes and seascapes, are equally crucial for livelihoods and social cohesion, impacting areas such as food security, agricultural practices, water and land management or social safety networks. Such diversity is embedded in the wealth of cultural heritage practices and sites – inscribed on UNESCO's Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and of World Heritage – from ocean-related practices such as Carolinian wayfinding and canoe making (Federated States of Micronesia), wetland agricultural practices (Kuk Early Agricultural Site in Papua New Guinea) or sand drawing practices (Vanuatu), to legacies of Pacific chiefly systems and their associated knowledge (Chief Roi Mata's Domain in Vanuatu), colonial urban heritage (Levuka Historical Port Town in Fiji) or 20th century global heritage of the nuclear age (Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site in Marshall Islands).

**The Pacific is characterized by longstanding regional integration and cooperation, forging a renewed regional diplomacy** (Fry, Tarte, 2015). Such cooperation is operated by regional bodies among which the Pacific Community (SPC) created as early as 1947 or the Pacific Islands Forum, founded in 1971. Spurred by the isolation and limited resources of island countries, as well as their converging social, cultural, environmental and economic features, regional cooperation also echoed the aspiration to advocate a collective Pacific position within global policy – notably as regards the funding for climate adaptation and mitigation – and strengthen national and regional ownership of development pathways. Regional policies are notably guided by the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, endorsed in 2022, which carves a Pacific led roadmap across areas such as peace and security, people centered development, resource and economic development, climate change and disasters, ocean and natural environment, technology and connectivity or political leadership and regionalism.

The Pacific Islands are home to a diverse range of Indigenous Peoples, speaking **19%** of the world's estimated **5,000** languages

United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues, 2015



## SIDS IN THE PACIFIC:

UNESCO Member States: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

\*UNESCO Associate Members: New Caledonia and Tokelau.



### We

- **recognise** the significance of the mutually reinforcing relationship between culture and sustainable development.
- **reaffirm** the importance of self-determination and the need for investment in culture as a driver and enabler of social, economic, environmental and spiritual wellbeing.
- **reclaim** our sacred connection to the land, sea and peoples of Oceania, our roles as custodians and the relationships that define our identity and connection to place and space.
- **proudly acknowledge** our role as custodians of the world's largest, most peaceful and abundant ocean, its many islands and its rich diversity of cultures.
- **celebrate and draw strength** from the culture and traditions, languages, social values and religious freedoms and beliefs that bind citizens and communities together, providing sustenance, social stability and resilience.
- **commit to our shared responsibility** for our significant terrestrial and oceanic resources, which provide livelihoods and opportunities for sustainable development.
- **recognise** our collective ways of being through regional cooperation.
- **strive** for excellence through effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness.
- **accept** responsibility and accountability to each other through reciprocity and committing to lifting each other up and nurturing these relationships with the utmost of care and respect for our peoples.

Preamble, Pacific Regional Culture Strategy 2022-2032  
The Pacific Culture Decade towards  
Sustainable Cultural development

## The Cultural Policy Landscape



Some  
**40%**  
of the Pacific SIDS  
Member States reported  
to have a public policy in  
place for culture

UNESCO,  
Pacific Community (SPC),  
2019

### *Profiling culture in the public policy agendas*

**Culture has been gaining ground as a formal public policy area in Pacific SIDS over the past two decades.** In 2019, some 40% of the Pacific SIDS Member States reported to have a public policy in place for culture (UNESCO, SPC, 2019), including Cook Islands' 2017-2030 National Cultural Policy, Samoa's 2018-2028 National Culture Framework, Solomon Islands' 2017-2030 National Policy Framework blong Kalsa or Tuvalu's 2018-2024 National Culture Policy Strategic Plan. In the last 5 years, new culture policy frameworks were enacted, including Fiji's 2023-2033 Cultural Policy or Papua New Guinea's 2022-2032 Cultural Policy. Recent cultural policies are of a more comprehensive nature, addressing different components of culture and sometimes encompassing sub-sectoral policies. In Samoa, the national culture framework encompasses three national policies, respectively focused on cultural industries, culture in education and cultural heritage.

**Strengthening the governance of culture remains a strong area of policy engagement.** Issues related to governance are often a standalone pillar of cultural policy frameworks, reflecting the need to enhance the management of the cultural sector as a dedicated policy area, while also speaking to the transversal role of culture across the policy spectrum. For example, Papua New Guinea's 2022-2032 cultural policy clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the government and cultural agencies, while Tuvalu's 2018 National Culture Policy Strategic Plan establishes a Culture Development coordinating committee, to mainstream culture for community well-being and sustainable development. Overall, financial and staff capacities of national cultural agencies remain limited and subject to shifting priorities of government budget allocations.

**Reflecting this policy commitment, the culture sector has undergone growing institutionalization over the past 20 years.** Most countries of the region now have a ministry of culture, either as a standalone policy domain (Cook Islands, Fiji), or in combination with other policy areas including education (Samoa, Tonga), internal affairs (Kiribati, Marshall Islands), tourism (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Palau), youth and sports (Timor Leste) or social

services (Niue) – a specificity which is conducive to transversal policymaking. Such institutionalization was also amplified by the regional cooperation notably operated by SPC. A review of the regional strategy Investing in Pacific cultures 2010-2020 undertaken by SPC highlighted a significant rise of institutional capacities over the period. For example, in Fiji the Department of Heritage and Arts increased its budget by 55% from 2008 to 2016, while the number of staff increased from 3 to 22 (UNESCO, SPC, 2019).

**The history of museography across the region also reflects a specific approach to the protection of cultural property, deeply intertwined with indigenous knowledge and practices.** The Pacific Islands Museum Association, founded in 1994, testifies to this commitment, bringing together some 42 museums and cultural centres across the region. While some of the current museums found their origin in the colonial period, they have reshaped their approaches, away from a focus on objects and their aesthetic value, towards strong linkages with safeguarding indigenous practices and languages and fostering community participation, with a focus on intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge, threats on indigenous languages or biodiversity loss. The museum of Fiji, for example, builds on its archeological collection to shares stories of ocean people, highlighting indigenous knowledge, while also opening a conversation with the public on the impact of climate change. The Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta Cultural Centre is involved in recording oral traditions and documenting indigenous knowledge, proposing education activities for local populations and visitors. In the aftermath of the pandemic, supporting the economic viability of cultural institutions has proven challenging, requiring rethinking economic models as well as the role of museums as an institution that goes beyond the domain of cultural heritage preservation. Likewise, strengthening the resilience of cultural institutions is crucial in the face of the impact of climate change and disasters.

**Such upward trajectory towards positioning culture within the public policy agenda was severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.** The pandemic struck amidst a context where some cultural institutions were recently established or in the process of strengthening their capacities, while cultural ecosystems, institutions and sites were highly dependent on tourism revenues or international cooperation. A 2021 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment conducted by UNESCO across 15 Pacific countries concluded that the pandemic and the interruption of international travel had severely impacted the entire cultural and creative sectors, disrupting cultural professionals' livelihoods, while also jeopardizing the sustainability of cultural sites and institutions. Some 80% of national cultural institutions reported cuts in budgets and staff (UNESCO, 2021).

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, **some 80%** of national cultural institutions reported cuts in budgets and staff

UNESCO, 2021



**In light of its massive impact, the pandemic also entailed a shift in perceptions and practices within the cultural sector towards strengthened localization and ownership.** The renewed awareness on how heavily the cultural sector depended on tourism and international aid spurred an aspiration for stronger localization. In the face of national agencies' closures and public budget cuts, small and medium sized enterprises in the cultural industries, including within the informal economy, have become a key supplier for local communities, spurring the development of niche markets while also highlighting the role of women within the value chain and the insufficiently tapped potential of indigenous economies. Such shift has increased the recognition of culture's role in enabling locally-owned prosperity and resilience. Likewise, the pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of the sector, spurring collaborative working practices between artists and cultural practitioners as in Cook Islands, or encouraging the development of digital platforms by museums as in Samoa or Fiji (UNESCO, 2021).

**The geography of the islands, spanned across dispersed atolls, raises specific cultural policy challenges.** Ensuring equal access to culture, supporting cultural participation or community-owned cultural processes – including for inventories or safeguarding plans – requires decentralized and collaborative policy models, encompassing traditional governance structures operated by local and indigenous communities, local governments where existing, as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) within and beyond the cultural sector. Some national governments have adapted their governance structure to enable such participatory approach. For example, further to the adoption of its first cultural policy, Tonga established decentralized cultural coordination committees on each of the island groups clustering some 169 islands (UNESCO, SPC, 2019). In some cases, however, bridging government structures with customary chiefdoms remains challenging (UCLG, 2019).

**CSOs and private sector entities have a growing and increasingly recognized function in delivering cultural policies.** Owing to a more enabling policy environment offered by newly developed cultural policy frameworks and supported by regional and international cooperation, some CSOs have benefited from training or peer-to-peer learning. CSOs contribute to service delivery within the culture sector – notably community-based inventories of cultural heritage or support to creative entrepreneurship – partly filling public policy gaps linked with geographical constraints or capacity issues, although their role is less enshrined as regards policy formulation and analysis. The elaboration of Fiji's 2023 cultural policy was backed by a robust consultation process, highlighting CSO's upward engagement in policy design. CSOs are also instrumental to connect culture with other development sectors such as health, gender, or the environment. The private sector equally plays a growing role in support of the cultural sector. In Samoa for example, the Samoa Small Business Enterprise Centre partnered with the Secretariat of SPC in 2015 to provide entrepreneurship training to the creative sector, reaching the crafts, visual arts and design sectors (UNESCO, SPC, 2019). Likewise, tourism stakeholders, notably diving operators, were engaged in the consultations regarding the ratification of the UNESCO 2001 Convention in Fiji (2023), Solomon Islands (2021) and Marshal Islands (2022).

**However, the governance of the cultural sector remains fragmented.** Cultural institutions and stakeholders have tended to work in silo, with insufficient engagement between government agencies and public institutions in charge of cultural heritage on the one hand, communities, CSOs and private sector entities engaged in cultural industries and living heritage on the other hand. Such fragmented approach, which has also been shaped by international cooperation practices, hampers cross-sectoral work, particularly between cultural heritage and CCIs.

## ***Forging a policy commitment through international normative frameworks***

**Pacific SIDS have a longstanding commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage as a unifying factor within the region.** This longstanding focus on the protection of cultural heritage is reflected in cultural policies since their early development. From the early post-independence years in the 1960s and 1970s, Pacific leaders emphasized the need to protect indigenous cultures, encompassing living traditions and languages – a commitment which took shape through the establishment of the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC). From its first edition in Fiji to its 13th edition planned to be hosted in Hawaii in 2024, this major regional gathering has acted not only as a space for cultural interactions, but also as a platform to forge a Pacific-led vision of development and to support policy engagement in the field of culture. While its founders emphasized the importance to protect traditional cultural practices and indigenous languages, the festival opened up to a diversity of cultural and creative practices.

**Reflecting the commitment towards cultural heritage protection, Pacific SIDS are strongly engaged in the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention,** with a near universal ratification to date. Further to Fiji and Solomon Islands joining the Convention in the early 1990s, most Pacific SIDS became State parties at the turn of the century, reflecting the broadening of World Heritage conservation towards comprehensive approaches encompassing cultural and natural heritage. Yet, despite their early engagement in the Convention, the level of implementation remains limited with only 8 inscribed World Heritage properties across the 14 State parties, including 4 natural or mixed sites, with 2 of them being on the danger list. The 4 cultural World Heritage properties include 3 archaeological sites – linked with early human settlements or indigenous chiefdoms – and 1 urban site, therefore not fully reflecting the diversity of cultural heritage across the region and its intrinsic linkages with natural heritage and with intangible practices. Strengthened commitment will be needed to address such gap, through enhanced capacity building, and by connecting the implementation of the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention with the 2003 and 2005 Conventions in more systemic ways. The 2021-2025 Pacific Regional World Heritage Action Plan will support such endeavour by expanding regional capacity building efforts targeting the preparation of nomination files or the management of World heritage properties, including in relation to sustainable tourism or climate adaptation.

**Pacific SIDS are equally engaged in the implementation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention with 14 State parties.** Almost all countries ratified the Convention from 2008 to 2018, reflecting its profound relevance to Pacific perspectives, notably as regards the safeguarding of indigenous knowledge and practices and the emphasis on community-led processes. The 5 living heritage practices inscribed on the Convention's Lists express societies' close relationship with the ocean, and societal values enshrined in living heritage practices linked with crafts and performing arts. To support countries in implementing the Convention, training of trainers workshops were jointly conducted in 2021 by UNESCO and the International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region, leading to the formation of a network of local experts. Support is also provided to custodian communities to develop community-based inventorying and safeguarding plans, including in relation to disaster-risk preparedness and post-disaster recovery – as reflected by an ongoing project conducted by UNESCO in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu – in view of the critical threat posed by disasters and climate change to the transmission and viability of cultural practices.

**The commitment towards the promotion of the cultural industries is gaining ground, building on linkages between cultural industries and living practices.** Creative expressions across the region – from crafts, performing arts and visual arts, to film, fashion, digital arts or literature – are strongly intertwined with living and indigenous cultures. From the creation of the FESTPAC in 1972, to the adoption of SPC’s 2010-2020 Regional Culture Strategy which encompasses cultural industries, policy visions have shifted from strengthening the ownership of cultural and indigenous cultural expressions to harnessing their impact on development and resilience. Over the past few years, efforts have focused on structuring the cultural and creative sectors at policy level, while also enabling stronger and more organized cultural ecosystems at CSO level. Such is the purpose, for example, of the grant scheme “Enhancing capacity for the sustainability of CCIs in the Pacific” implemented from 2021 to 2024 by SPC and targeting Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands. The adoption of Samoa’s 2018-2028 National Cultural Industry’s policy also reflects the aspiration of national governments to frame and support the sector; the document outlines governance mechanisms of the sector, including through the creation of a Cultural Industries taskforce to enhance cross-sectoral policy delivery. Three countries of the region have ratified the UNESCO 2005 Convention so far – a ratification rate which remains limited, but is likely to increase in the coming years, further to ongoing capacity building efforts deployed by UNESCO. While islands’ remoteness hampers cultural trade at regional or international levels, the digital environment opens up significant opportunities, requiring policy engagement in adapting intellectual property frameworks.



*Men from Papua New Guinea wearing cultural masks, on the occasion of the Rabaul mask Festival  
Ron van der Stappen/Shutterstock.com\**

**In contrast, the implementation of the UNESCO 2001 Convention remains low, with only two state parties to date.** Yet, the safeguarding of underwater cultural heritage is of particular relevance to the region and could bear significant benefits. In terms of scientific knowledge, underwater cultural heritage – including submerged human settlements, shipwrecks, stone fish traps or ancient ports – hold great potential for reconstructing past cultures, including cultural routes, while also advancing climate knowledge. Furthermore, in view of existential threats of climate change on the most low-lying islands, a portion of countries’ cultural heritage is at risk of being submerged in the future, requiring anticipation and early documentation to sustain communities’ memory. Conversely, some of the shipwrecks present across the region, notably dating back to the Second World War, bear significant risks, notably in terms of maritime pollution, which calls for enhanced international cooperation, an aspect at the core of the 2001 Convention. In order to support the region, a gap analysis was conducted in 2021 to compare national

legislations with requirements of the UNESCO 2001 Convention. Several capacity building activities were also rolled out over the past few years, including online training suites involving policymakers but also tourism operators in the Solomon Islands and Marshall Islands. Despite the limited number of ratifications, progress was made over the past two years; a model law developed by UNESCO was domesticized by several countries of the region, even before their ratifying the Convention. Strengthened collaboration with SPC could also be considered to support ratification and implementation of this Convention.

Likewise, countries of the region are vulnerable to the illicit trafficking of cultural property, both as source and transit countries, particularly in a context where transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking, is on the rise across the region, due to its geographic location as well as discrepancies in law enforcement capacity between countries (UNODC, 2016). While some countries have developed specific laws or institutional mechanisms to prohibit illicit import or export of cultural property – including the Customs service operated by Fiji or the export permits implemented by Solomon Islands– no country has ratified the UNESCO 1970 Convention, which hampers the capacity to ensure effective, coordinated fight against illicit trafficking at regional level. Among specific challenges are notably ocean border control, communal ownership of cultural heritage, cultural infrastructure development, resource constraints and lack of awareness of cultural property laws among visitors and the expatriate community, as reported in a 2015 UNESCO workshop (UNESCO, 2015).

### ***Building on a dynamic and longstanding regional cooperation***

**Culture has been a federating component of regional cooperation, not only as a dedicated policy area, but also as an aspect of broader development plans.** The early creation of the FESTPAC in 1972 proved instrumental to forge shared awareness of the importance to join hands to sustain Pacific cultures and languages in a fast-evolving environment, supporting cross-cultural exchanges, but also informing the development of cultural policies. Across the years, culture has been anchored in regional planning instruments, testifying to its recognition by Pacific Leaders as essential to forge Pacific-led development pathways. Culture was first encompassed in the 2004 Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration, which laid the foundation for the adoption of the Regional Strategy Investing in Pacific Cultures 2010-2020 as the first culture-specific policy framework. The framework was renewed with the 2022-2032 Pacific Regional Cultural Strategy: Sustainable Cultural Development, endorsed by Culture Ministers in 2022 and launched at the Pacific Forum Leaders meeting in July 2022. The strategy focuses on cultural policy, cultural heritage, cultural wellbeing, cultural innovation, and cultural statistics; among the focus areas are safeguarding indigenous languages, knowledge systems and practices, upholding cultural and indigenous rights, protecting bio-cultural diversity, enhancing local production and consumption, and bolstering the CCIs.

**Culture also informs overarching Pacific development strategies, particularly the 2050 Blue Pacific Continent Strategy adopted by Pacific Leaders in 2022.** The Strategy articulates a Pacific led pathway to sustainable development that places “great value on our ocean and land, and celebrate a deep connection to our community, natural environment, resources, livelihoods, faiths, cultural values and traditional knowledge”. The values and commitments enshrined in the strategy are conducive to a culture-led approach to development. Culture also underpins the people-centered approach which cuts across the strategy, recognizing that “Pacific peoples draw

their identity and inspiration from their cultural diversity and deep cultural and spiritual attachments to their land and the ocean”, while also seeking to integrate local and indigenous communities in implementation mechanisms of the strategy.



*We treasure the diversity and heritage of the Pacific and seek an inclusive future in which our faiths, cultural values, and traditional knowledge are respected, honored and protected [...] we encourage innovation and creativity and respect our cultural values and traditional knowledge.*

2050 Blue Pacific Continent Strategy

**The Pacific Community (SPC) is a crucial player in the field of culture.** The organisation is in charge of implementing the regional culture strategy, as well as organizing the FestPAC in collaboration with the the Council of Pacific Arts. It also provides policy advice and technical assistance to its member states – encompassing 27 Country and Territory Members – to develop national policy and legal frameworks in the field of culture, some of which is delivered in partnership with UNESCO. Among the areas of intervention are notably the development of national cultural policies, the alignment of culture and education strategies, the framing of the cultural industries, the development of cultural statistics frameworks or the integration of traditional knowledge in national policies.

**Regional cooperation in the field of culture is also a strategic implementation modality across the region for UNESCO’s programmes and conventions.** Such cooperation could be consolidated, strategized and operationalized. A more structured dialogue is needed, under the aegis of SPC, to take stock of existing programmes implemented by international cooperation organisations – including UNESCO, ILO, WIPO, the European Union or the ACP, but also relevant bilateral cooperation in the field of culture – to inform the implementation of the regional strategy, support information exchange and spur more effective resource mobilization. Cooperation with Australia and New Zealand could be further harnessed, not only targeting these countries as donors and technical partners, but also as destination countries for a large Pacific diaspora. Such cooperation is likely to inform the strengthening of Pacific SIDS cultural policies based on solidarity and reciprocity, by providing technical assistance in the development of the cultural sector, enabling peer-to-peer learning and regional dialogue, as well as fully engaging diasporas in the cultural sector.

**A more streamlined regional cooperation will also help bring Pacific SIDS voices stronger within the global policy dialogue on culture.** The Pacific was strongly represented in the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies – MONDIACULT 2022 in September 2022, through interventions of Ministers of Culture, a joint statement delivered by New Caledonia in plenary in the name of all countries, as well as interventions of SPC representatives. SPC was instrumental in following-up on the Conference, notably by hosting a Post-MONDIACULT and Pacific Regional Culture Strategy workshop in May 2023 and the 6th meeting of Pacific Ministers

of Culture in June 2023, to discuss implementation pathways of the outcomes of MONDIACULT by Pacific SIDS, in connexion with areas of concerns for the region. In preparation of the next edition of MONDIACULT in September 2025 in Barcelona, a strategic trajectory could be carved by SPC to ensure a strong Pacific presence, taking stock of progress made by Pacific SIDS within their national cultural policies, while also bringing Pacific insights within the global conversation, notably on areas such as cultural rights or the role of culture for climate action.

## Culture and sustainable development: an overview

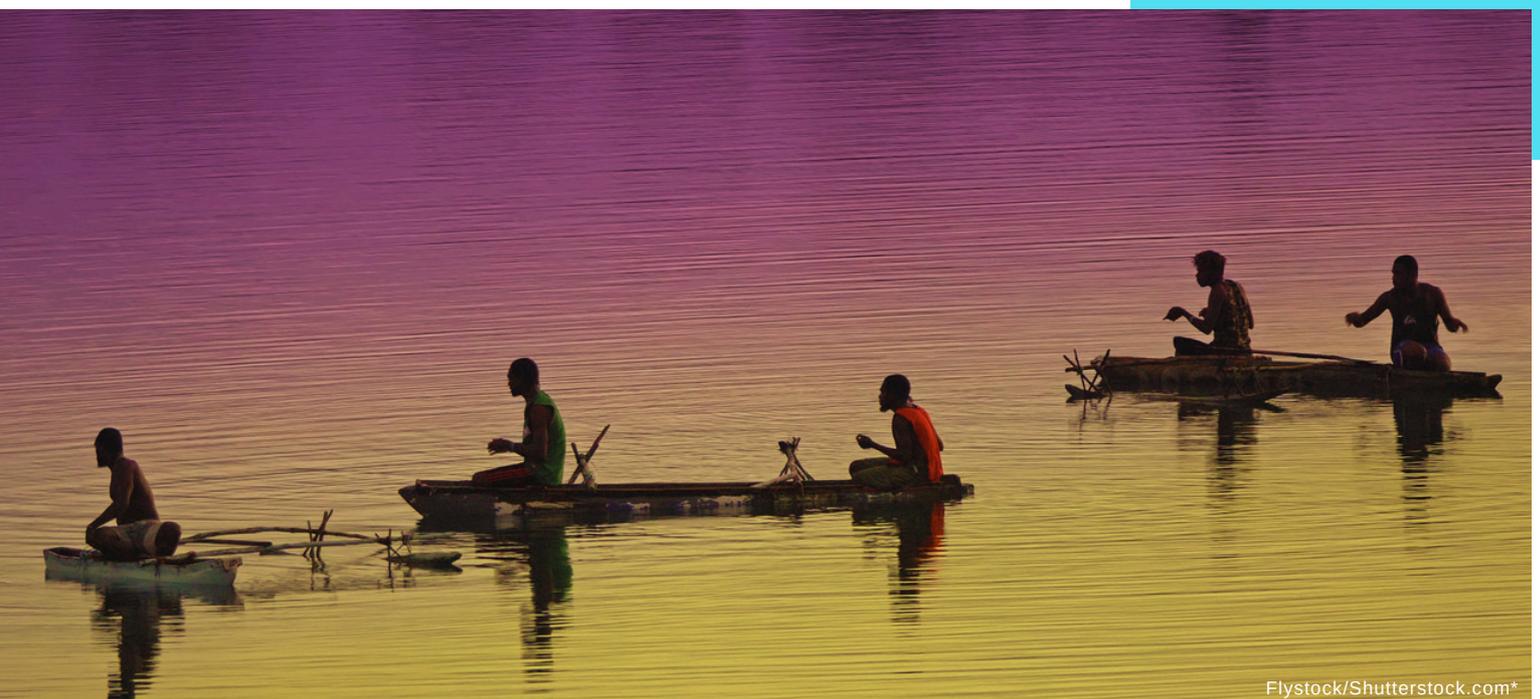
### *Forging a Pacific-led, culture-specific pathway*

**Countries of the region have expressed unequivocal aspiration to harness culture to carve a Pacific-led vision of development.** Over the past years, the region has shifted the narrative of development away from the “deficiency approach” focusing on “small, isolated, underdeveloped nations”, towards a more positive approach envisioning Pacific countries as “large Ocean States” and promoting communities’ inclusion and participation – a shift which is enshrined in the 2050 Blue Pacific Continent Strategy. Such vision is conducive to renew the commitment to Pacific ethics and values of relationality, localisation and resilience, revaluing indigenous knowledge systems that promote community-based approach to sustainable development, while also supporting community ownership of development processes.



*Pacific peoples draw their identity and inspiration from their cultural diversity and deep cultural and spiritual attachments to their land and the ocean.*

PIFS, 2022



Flystock/Shutterstock.com\*

**Echoing this vision, Pacific countries advocate for encompassing indigenous knowledge systems to inform sustainable development strategies and processes.** Indigenous knowledge embed resilience and adaptation mechanisms that can be activated by communities in diverse contexts. Over the past decades, customary systems have tended to be regarded by international development partners as a barrier, rather than a precondition for development. Such tendency to overlook indigenous knowledge has shifted with the COVID-19 pandemic, when Pacific communities have relied on traditional relationships with the land and kinship networks, spurring resilience and collaboration. For example, Pacific traditional practices of telling stories (talanoa and tok stori) brought people together in family or community spaces, while intergenerational transmission of fishing and farming skills enabled communities to survive (UNESCO, 2021). Such focus on indigenous knowledge systems and localized guardianship should be considered more systematically when developing and implementing cultural policies, and when shaping sustainable development plans. Supporting existing community-led processes, and engaging community members as knowledge bearers enables meaningful and impactful sustainable development programmes. Such approach can also prove cost effective in Pacific contexts where financial resources to support culture are scarce. Community-led approaches are being utilized by public agencies or international partners as part of development programmes, such as the Spotlight Initiative in Samoa, where culture and the arts create safe spaces for community dialogue and social messaging around gender-based violence.

**Overall, cultural policies in the sub-region are more closely aligned with sustainable development policies than in other regions of the world.** The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development accelerated such trend, spurring a more strategic approach to culture and development, including in countries that do not currently have dedicated cultural policies. Supporting a cohesive approach, a regional 2023-2027 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework was adopted covering 14 Pacific Islands Countries and Territories. The Framework acknowledges traditional knowledge and culture as enablers for the design of development programmes, underlining its importance for resilience, notably in relation to food security and disaster risk management, as well as towards forging a “value-based economy”.

**Culture is also among the pillars of national development plans enacted by several countries, most of which explicitly underline indigenous values and practices.** Niue’s 2016-2026 National Strategic Plan encompasses the concept of Taoga Niue, reflecting the ownership of cultures and languages to sustain wellbeing and livelihoods. Likewise, Kiribati’s 20-year vision 2016-2036 addresses cultural capital as one of the three components of wealth, together with natural and human capital. Similarly, Nauru’s 2005-2025 National Development Strategy underlines, as a measurable target, traditional leadership and culture as critical for healthy, cohesive and self-reliant communities. Conversely, regional and national cultural policy frameworks also address sustainable development priorities. For example, in its 2023 Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the government of Fiji refers to the recently adopted cultural policy, which puts forward the role of culture towards development targets on trade and employment, poverty alleviation, women empowerment, youth development, health, or agriculture and fisheries.

**However, despite culture being profiled in sustainable development plans, challenges remain to operationalize such Pacific approach to development.** The culture sector continues to work in relative isolation at both policy and operational levels, with insufficient interministerial cooperation and a tendency towards silo approaches, including within the culture sector. Such fragmented governance was also amplified by international development paradigms over the past

decades, which have tended to promote a sectoral approach, isolating culture from other development areas, while also spurring a fragmentation of the cultural sector, with cultural heritage and the creative economy being addressed by distinct organisations despite their intrinsic linkages. The implementation of transversal policy mechanisms could support a more comprehensive approach to policy-making. For example, more systematic use of cultural impact assessments could contribute to advancing the place of culture in development planning. In that domain, SPC's Social Development Programme has started to develop at the regional level guidelines for conducting such assessments, which may serve as a basis to develop national policy tools.

### ***Leveraging the intrinsic relationships between cultural and biological diversity***

**Pacific cultures are characterized by intrinsic linkages between communities and their natural environment.** Such vision of interconnectedness has forged societal and ethical values of relationality, kinship and communal unity, while also laying the ground for a diversity of cultural practices linked with the natural environment, and shaping indigenous cultures and languages. Social, ritual, agricultural or festive practices, crafts and performing arts, as well as oral traditions and expressions, are often sustained by knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. A broad range of traditional and indigenous practices and knowledge relate notably to pastoralism, artisanal fishing, rotational agriculture, water and land management, as well as sea voyaging, transhumance and navigation. Indigenous observations and interpretations of meteorological and oceanic phenomena have long guided communities, as for example the no-fishing area orbul enforced by Palau's fishermen to close an area of reef to harvesting during periods of fish spawning. Likewise, the importance of lunar cycles and star position for Niue's communities – as a source of knowledge, health and daily regulation, led to Niue being designated as the world's first Dark Sky Nation in 2020.

**Vernacular architecture is also tailored to the region's warm and humid climate and often relies on organic building materials** such as timber, bamboo, coconut palm, pandanus, cane, grasses or reeds. Traditional architecture exhibits a diversity of shapes, functions and building techniques across the region and is deeply enshrined with cosmogony and social organisation. Thatch roofs and mats are a recurrent, yet highly diverse feature. Walls can be patterned with weaving and lashing techniques, or omitted to enable ventilation. In view of its exposure to hazards such as hurricanes, insect attacks or fire, architecture is sustained by a collective tradition of maintenance and rebuilding. Among the examples are notably Samoan fales, Kiribati's maneaba meeting houses, Fijian bure village houses or Papua New Guinea's haus tambaran sacred houses (Saini, 1978).

**The region's exposure to the effects of climate change and disasters directly impacts upon Pacific cultures.** Such risks not only weaken the conservation of cultural heritage sites and structures, but also the viability and transmission of living heritage, impacting livelihoods, food security and social cohesion, and disrupting cultural and ritual practices. For example, sea level rise entailed the loss of burial sites in Korsrae, Micronesia, while saltwater penetration jeopardizes the production of pulaka, a highly nutritional root consumed in Tuvalu and Samoa, whose family production is driven by skills transmitted across generations. Similarly, the Carolinian wayfinding and canoe-making techniques of the Federated States of Micronesia is threatened by environmental degradation and lack of intergenerational transmission. Likewise, the climate-induced relocation of the Vunidogoloa village in Fiji in 2014 – the first of its kind in the region

– disrupted the spiritual relationship of communities with their ancestral land (Charan, Singh, 2017), while the displacement of the Ambae community in Vanuatu, further to the eruption of the Manaro Vouli volcano in September 2017, impacted traditional practices of sand drawing or weaving, requiring safeguarding plans. UNESCO also provided support to five Pacific SIDS in enhancing their emergency preparedness and response for cultural preservation. This included conducting a risk assessment mission to the underwater cultural heritage site of Chuuk Lagoon in Micronesia in 2017; undertaking a damage assessment mission to Tongatapu Island, Tonga, following Cyclone Gita; monitoring the state of cultural heritage in Vanuatu and Fiji in 2020 through satellite imagery after Tropical Cyclone Harold; and facilitating a participatory assessment of needs related to intangible cultural heritage within the Ambae community in Vanuatu in 2018.

**Against this backdrop, indigenous and local knowledge have long provided community resilience and adaptation in the face of climate change and disasters.** Such knowledge has enabled sustainable management of natural resources, and adaptation to weather and climate variability, supporting food security, collaboration and communal unity in contexts of resource scarcity. Among numerous examples, the traditional inati system in Tokelau ensures fair distribution of fish following a collective fishing expedition, maintaining social harmony in precarious conditions. Pacific sites also provide vital knowledge and scientific information about biodiversity and climate. The East Rennell corall atoll in the Solomon Islands, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1998, provides a natural laboratory for scientific study, notably as regards island biogeography, species migration and evolution of the climate. Likewise, the remains of stone villages in the Rock Island South Lagoon World Heritage site in Palau, whose occupation dates back to 5,000 years ago, testifies to the combined consequences of climate change, population growth and subsistence behaviours.

### *Harnessing culture for economic diversification*

**The culture sector is increasingly considered as strategic to economic diversification and locally owned development.** The aspiration to work towards economic diversification stands as a priority across the Pacific, as outlined in the Pacific Regional Culture Strategy 2022-2032. Such vision was consolidated further to the pandemic, which exposed the vulnerability of existing economic models, considered as too exogenous, and exacerbated the need for Pacific countries to shape economic diversification trajectories. In that context, culture is increasingly considered as a high potential sector, conducive to locally anchored and employment intensive growth, particularly targeting the youth in view of the brain drain that the region is faced with. Such culture-led economic diversification is expected to bring about positive social and environmental externalities, and to enable localized innovation. Among the areas that are given priority attention are cultural tourism on the one hand, CCIs on the other hand.

**Cultural tourism stands as a high-potential pathway for economic diversification, stepping away from mass-tourism models.** Overall, the tourism sector is a major source of income in the Pacific, representing a significant portion of national GDPs, up to 40% in Fiji (Ministry of Finance of Fiji, 2024), which stands as the most visited country of the region with over 636,000 arrivals in 2022 (source: Tourism Fiji). While the COVID-19 pandemic massively disrupted the tourism industry in the Pacific, it also spurred aspirations towards locally owned, more sustainable tourism models, bridging visitors' experience with communities' engagement. Such aspiration is materialized in the Pacific Tourism Organization's Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework (SPTO, 2021), which advocates for "visible and valued cultures" as one of its four overarching goals, also providing in its Destination Standard a set of criteria to operationalize such vision. In that context,

In SIDS, women  
constitute  
**more than half**  
of the workforce in  
the tourism sector

ILOSTAT  
2020



cultural tourism stands as a high-value sector, providing environmentally and economically sustainable sources of growth with fewer negative externalities, while also supporting localized revenue generation and employment (World Bank, 2023) including for women and youth.

**Such policy shift towards sustainable cultural tourism is reflected in a number of national policy frameworks, measures and initiatives.** For example, Cook Island's 2022 Tourism Development Strategy encourages regenerative tourism practices to ensure that visitors have a positive influence on the social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being, providing specific guidance on certification schemes, visitor education campaigns, cultural tourism offer, as well as market positioning. Similarly, Vanuatu's 2019-2030 Sustainable Tourism Policy seeks to enable "visitors connecting with the environment, culture and people" through authentic and quality cultural products and services as well as enriched tourism experience. In 2017, Palau was the first country to require visitors to sign an eco-pledge as part of the visa process. The Palau Pledge encourages visitors to travel responsibly by taking steps to protect local wildlife, learn more about the local culture and support local businesses. In partnership with the Bureau of Tourism, Palau Pledge also developed an official certification programme for local businesses in 2022 to reduce negatives impacts on the environment, increase efficiency and educate visitors about the Pledge.

**The investment in the cultural sector supports the diversification of cultural tourism products and experience.** Cultural tourism can drive opportunities for countries to foster structural investment in the cultural sector. Supporting the development of heritage sites, museums and cultural centres, enabling the expansion of the crafts and cultural industries, fostering access to underwater cultural heritage, are all conducive to expanding the cultural tourism offer, enabling visitors to engage with Pacific culture while also supporting cultural professionals and practitioners. For example, the development of dive tourism at the Chuuk Lagoon protected site in the Federated States of Micronesia enables visitors to discover sunken World War II ships and aircrafts, while the indigenous double hull canoe "Drua" put on display at the Fiji Museum also provides tourists with a trip on board crewed by traditional wayfinders.

**Cultural tourism products should be developed and promoted in close collaboration with communities and heritage bearers to minimize the risks of commodification and misappropriation.** This is particularly important in view of the preeminence of indigenous

cultures, which calls for inclusive approaches to engaging communities. In a context where the Pacific culture has at times been subjected to commodification and stereotypes – including in the international audiovisual industry, displaying a homogeneous and somewhat paternalistic vision of Pacific indigenous cultures – enabling communities to shape cultural narratives and decide upon ways to share their culture is essential to inform the development of such cultural tourism products, away from a consumption model. Likewise, ensuring communities' economic agency of such processes is equally crucial to make sure that tourism revenues are equally distributed.

**Overall, the development of cultural tourism across the Pacific requires public policy investment and regulation,** to ensure sustainable impact on local communities. A whole-of-government approach is needed, notably across the labour, trade and digital policies. Such prospect should also be anchored in community-driven governance, to enable fair remuneration of cultural work, and meaningful cultural interactions between local communities and visitors, respectful of indigenous cultures. Finally, more sustainable funding mechanisms, bridging public and private sources, should be sought.

**In recent years, the potential of the CCIs for economic diversification has also received growing attention.** While the CCIs have been encompassed in SPC's regional cultural policy since its inception, their economic impact has only recently started to be acknowledged by public policies. The cultural and creative expressions – from performing and visual arts to crafts – have long been considered as critical to upholding the region's cultural identity, notably in relation to the safeguarding of traditional and indigenous knowledge; however, they have been considered so far as marginal contributors to economic growth. In recent years, the interest for the creative economy has gained traction, building on a comprehensive vision bridging customary and contemporary forms of creation. The 2022-2032 Pacific Regional Culture Strategy encompasses "cultural innovation" as one of its priorities, aspiring to support new expressions of culture drawing on the region's customary and indigenous cultures. The promotion of the cultural industries is considered as enabling the safeguarding and transmission of cultural heritage practices and indigenous knowledge.



*Pacific Island Countries and Territories are interested in investing in opportunities that support the cultural and creative economy, bridge customary with contemporary ideas, build youth capability and leadership around arts and culture, and strengthen Pacific peoples' participation in global markets.*

Pacific Regional Culture Strategy 2022-2032, 'The Pacific Culture Decade: Towards sustainable cultural development'

**The impact of the creative economy on employment and inclusive growth is gradually gaining visibility across the region.** Particularly of interest for policymakers is its potential to support revenue generation and community benefits for cultural practitioners and custodians, including in rural areas, and to spur youth employment – in a context where brain drain remains a critical challenge and the cultural sector largely operates in the informal economy. Reflecting such potential, an ILO-led joint UN project on the Inclusive Economic Recovery through Sustainable Enterprises in the Informal Economies of Fiji, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu was launched in 2020 in

the context of the COVID-19 recovery, targeting both the cultural industries and the agriculture sector. The project enabled skills development of creative entrepreneurs, reviving notably the Pacific model of master-apprentice, and supported the structuring of the sector, as exemplified by the establishment of two creative associations in Fiji – the Fiji Islands Dance Association (FIDA) and Viti Association of Visual Arts (VAVA) – allowing to support mentorship schemes, enable access to new markets, while also seeking to formalize collaboration with national workers association to expand access to social security of cultural professionals. Likewise, a joint UN project launched in 2022 supports SDG acceleration by building economic diversification in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, encompassing a focus on strengthening the music sub-sector by improving entrepreneurial skills and the application of Intellectual property rights.

**Particular focus was laid over the past few years in strengthening and structuring the creative ecosystems.** While some arts councils and collective cultural networks have been operating for decades, emerging associations have been formed more recently to uphold cultural producers' rights. In order to sustain existing and emerging collectives, SPC and PIFS launched a 3,1 million EUR grant scheme in 2021 in collaboration with ACP-EU to provide financial support, technical advice, mentoring, and capacity building. Thanks to the programme, the Solomon Islands Music Federation founded 30 years back saw its constitutional mandate revised and its membership expanded. Likewise, a cultural industries entrepreneurship curriculum was developed in Samoa, benefiting 140 cultural producers in product design and development, market research or pricing. A selection of Pacific cultural enterprises were also supported to participate for the first time in the Artisan Resource @ NYNOW trade show in New York (USA), to gain exposure to international market trends, buyer demands and export distribution expectations. Similarly, in Lautem, Timor Leste, a community-driven local governance structure, the Lautem Cultural Alliance, was established with support from the organisation Many Hands International and the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity; mentorship was provided to support its governance structure and to draft a cultural plan and an agreement with the national government.

**National policy frameworks and mechanisms related to the creative economy are also gradually emerging, with enhanced support from regional and international organisations.** While Samoa issued in 2018 a dedicated National Cultural Industries policy – which targets notably the strengthening of governance schemes, the investment in digital and physical infrastructure as well as capacity building and incentive schemes – policy and regulatory frameworks still require strengthening in most Pacific islands. UNESCO supports capacity building and peer-to-peer learning to support ratification of the UNESCO 2005 Convention and the development of policies for creativity across the Pacific region – in a context where only 20% of Pacific SIDS have ratified the Convention so far. Targeted policy mechanisms were also developed in recent years to provide an enabling environment for creative enterprises, among which the Fijian Crafted Branding inaugurated by the Ministry of Industries, Trade and Tourism of Fiji. Likewise, engagement in education and training in the cultural and creative sector is emerging, with gradual inclusion of the CCIs in higher education curricula.

**Looking forward, addressing enduring challenges and strengthening policy mechanisms will be critical to enable the cultural industries to thrive.** Among the impediments which hamper the development of the sector are notably insufficient investment and fiscal incentives, outdated legislation, inadequate infrastructure and a lack of structured collaboration between

CSOs and public institutions. A whole-of-government approach will be necessary to strengthen labour rights of cultural professionals, provide an enabling environment for investment, support engagement in regional and international trade, but also strengthen intellectual property frameworks, including as regards collective rights, to prevent misappropriation of indigenous knowledge while enabling fair remuneration.

## Looking ahead: opportunities for policy engagement

### *Paving the way for a rights-based agenda*

**In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the priorities of regional policy dialogue and cooperation towards a stronger, more explicit emphasis on protecting cultural rights**, with particular focus on the preservation of Indigenous knowledge and languages – a long-standing area of interest in the region – but also to a growing extent on social and economic rights of artists and cultural custodians. The protection of cultural rights is prominently featured in the agendas of gatherings such as the 2022 SPC Council of Pacific Arts Meeting and the Meeting of Ministers of Culture, as well as the 2024 FESTPAC, influencing the formulation of national policies. Facilitating access of indigenous communities to places of cultural significance to sustain cultural practices and to encompass their vital connection to the environment, including in relation to food security, health, and well-being, as well as enabling the provision of legal support and protection to indigenous creators, are among the issues at stake.

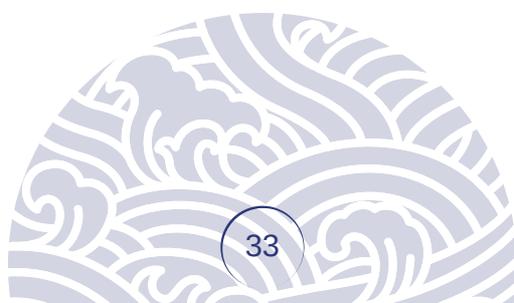
**Significant legislative and policy strides have been made in the protection of traditional knowledge and the expressions of culture in relation to intellectual property and copyright** – an aspect deemed as critical to the effective protection and exercise of cultural rights, including for indigenous communities. Regional organisations such as SPC, PIFS and SPREP have taken the lead, encompassing international developments in UNESCO or WIPO. In 2002, a regional framework for the protection of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture, including a model law, was developed to support countries in the face of increased threats of misappropriation or over-commercialization of traditional knowledge (SPC, 2002). The model law was intended to address the gaps of conventional intellectual property tools such as patents, copyrights, trademarks or geographical indications, most of which reward individual creativity, while traditional knowledge is vested in the community. Cook Islands' 2013 Traditional Knowledge Act or Niue's 2012 Tāoga Niue Act have encompassed provisions of this model law, while Vanuatu's 2000 Copyright and Related Rights Act also addresses the protection of indigenous knowledge. Likewise, the Melanesian Spearhead Group framework treaty on the protection of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture enacted in 2011 provided a similar framework. The policy reflection on intellectual property rights, trademark and copyright has also seen progress in relation to the FestPAC.

**However, the evolving policy landscape calls for reassessing and effectively enforcing legislation and policy frameworks linked to traditional knowledge, intellectual property and copyright.** While the model law has proven instrumental, its national domestication has shown limitations. Insufficient funding, infrastructure, and access to legal support hinder monitoring and enforcement efforts, leaving artists, cultural producers, and communities vulnerable. Given external threats and the increasing digitization of cultural assets, robust protection mechanisms

are indispensable. A hybrid policy approach is needed, encompassing education and awareness raising of indigenous and traditional knowledge holders (Salvin, 2012). Close engagement of customary leaders and institutions should be ensured, so as not to undermine or conflict with customary regulations, positioning States as facilitators rather than regulators (Salī, 2020). It is imperative to invest in and develop community-based enforcement mechanisms and protocols which empower cultural knowledge holders, practitioners and communities, while fostering accountability among consumers and audiences. Experience could also be drawn from other countries, including Australia and New Zealand, notably as regards the protection of local cultural content. Support can be provided by UNESCO, as part of the ongoing reflection on cultural rights, as well as WIPO, within its skills-development and support programmes.

**Sustaining cultural rights of Pacific diasporas is another growing area of engagement for countries.** The safeguarding of cultural heritage has been pivotal for Pacific countries to engage with their diasporas, particularly in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. Several Pacific countries have large diasporas – representing, for example, an estimated half of Tongans and Samoans – who are significant contributors to the national GDP, but also active players in safeguarding Pacific culture in destination countries. New Zealand alone was estimated in 2013 to host some 25 Pacific festivals each year (2013, Mackley-Crump), including the Pasifika festival, inaugurated in 1993 in Auckland, which gathers some 60,000 visitors each year. Some initiatives launched upon the initiative of diasporas to sustain their cultural and linguistic practices are further supported by the government of their countries of origin. For example, the Learning my roots campaign was launched in 2019 by the Fijian community in the United Kingdom to encourage the practice of iTaukei language – an initiative which was further supported by the government of Fiji, who developed the Ivolavosa application as a mobile dictionary targeting diasporas. Similarly, supporting Pacific cultures is increasingly encompassed in cultural policies of destination countries, as reflected by the ongoing programmes of the Ministry for Pacific Peoples of the Government of New Zealand. Overall, fostering a more systemic engagement of diasporas in Pacific SIDS bears significant potential to scaling-up the safeguarding of culture, bridging diasporas and policymakers in both origin and destination countries.

**Beyond cultural rights per se, culture is also increasingly harnessed to achieve other categories of rights, notably as regards gender equality,** in a context of high prevalence of gender-based violence. According to UN Women’s Global Database on Violence against Women, up to 68% of women in Samoa have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime. In that context, culture-based interventions can help challenge gender stereotypes and address entrenched gender inequalities. Such is the purpose of the Samoa Spotlight Initiative to End Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence, a Joint UN project focused on eradicating domestic and intimate partner violence (DV/IPV). A component of this project conducted by UNESCO aims to identify and address pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities that contribute to widespread acceptance of violence against women and girls as a part of everyday life. Culture provides safe spaces for community dialogue and social messaging regarding gender-based violence, while performing arts are utilized to alter mindsets and behaviours related to gender norms, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence.



## ***Bridging indigenous knowledge and ocean science for climate action***

**Pacific countries have taken a pioneering role in harnessing culture and indigenous knowledge for disaster risk management**, informing the development of strategies and methodologies which were subsequently implemented at larger scale within and beyond the region. In 2012, Samoa was one of the first countries to include culture in the multi-sectoral Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) following Cyclone Evan, embedding culture in longer term recovery policies. Such methodology has since been replicated across the sub-region – including in the aftermath of cyclones Pam in Vanuatu (2015), Winston in Fiji (2016), Harold in Fiji and Vanuatu (2020) and Judy and Kevin in Vanuatu (2023). In the wake of these disasters, culture teams were mobilized to assess damage and losses in the cultural sector, including by using satellite imagery with support from UNOSAT-UNITAR as in 2020 in Fiji. Outcomes of these exercises supported the prioritization of emergency stabilization and repair works and the funding of broader rehabilitation projects such as the Levuka port in Fiji. Such processes also proved instrumental to strengthen risk preparedness planning and environmental awareness policies, as well as to position the cultural sector within sustainable development programmes. Overall, this approach has set an example worldwide, leading to an increased number of PDNA reports including references to culture.



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**Other initiatives conducted over the past few years have strived to expand comprehensive resilience strategies, bridging the different dimensions of cultural and natural heritage.** As part of the Resilient Reefs initiative – a UNESCO initiative intended to support World Heritage coral reefs and their communities in climate adaptation – resilience strategies were developed for the Lagoons of New Caledonia and the Rock Island Southern Lagoon in Palau. These innovative strategies encompass in a comprehensive framework the safeguarding of natural and mixed heritage sites and practices as well as sustainable fisheries, seeking to harness traditional knowledge to foster collaborative science and map customary reserves, to bring together public and private stakeholders to optimize finance mechanisms, as well as to build institutional capacities through the designation of a full-time resilience officer. Strengthening resilience of Pacific communities in the face of climate change and disasters also relies on the safeguarding of living heritage, as exemplified by an ongoing UNESCO project which supports custodian communities in Fiji, Tonga

and Vanuatu to connect the safeguarding of living heritage to disaster risk reduction strategies through training workshops and mentoring schemes. A recent study conducted across the region also concludes that climate initiatives driven by living heritage such as traditional boat and vessel building or low-impact agricultural techniques tend to mobilize communities more effectively (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2023). Such dimension is increasingly encompassed in climate related national policies, such as Tuvalu's 2021-2023 Integrated Environment and Natural Resources Policy, which strives to enhance "environment stewardship and collective responsibility", referring notably to the documentation of traditional knowledge such as weather prediction or navigation skills to provide access to information. Similar efforts are undertaken to support cultural institutions in encompassing disaster risk prevention in the management of collections, an endeavor which should be further supported in the future.

**Traditional and indigenous knowledge is also increasingly drawn upon to enhance food security**, an aspect which has long been ensured through self-sustained systems by communities themselves, and which is now increasingly supported by public policies and international development programmes, reflecting a growing and much needed recognition of the importance of indigenous knowledge for livelihoods, health and resilience. In 2016, the Government of Kiribati launched a project in the islands of Maiana, Abemama and Nonouti, with support from the Global Environment Facility, to reduce vulnerability to climate change-induced food shortages. By reviving indigenous practices, the project assisted communities in testing more sustainable land and coastal fisheries management – including mini-hatcheries, milkfish ponds and mangrove plantation – and reviving traditional food preparation and preservation techniques. As a result, native crop varieties increased from 2 to 5 per village, fish populations were stabilized and food imports decreased. Such approach would gain being expanded at regional level, in a context where traditional food practices are at risk, in some places, to be gradually supplanted by processed alternatives. A study conducted in Baniata in the Solomon islands concluded that while home gardens, fishing and wild food collection still represented 70% of communities sustenance, there was a notable shift toward imported and processed food, eroding traditional practices and agrobiodiversity, while also jeopardizing food security and nutrition (FAO, 2021).

**Looking forward, Pacific perspectives on climate change – shaped by values of relationality, humility and respect – can inform meaningfully the global climate conversation.** Bridging Indigenous and other knowledge systems is more critical than ever to tackle the complexity of change processes needed to provide lasting climate solutions, in a context where quantitative or linear approaches to climate action have shown their limitations, as opposed to systemic visions enshrined in Pacific cultures (Crook and Rudiak-Gould, 2018). Pacific countries and communities have been strongly advocating over the past decade towards elevating local and indigenous voices in climate fora, empowering local leaders and knowledge keepers and putting to the fore local stories on impact and adaptation to inform decision-making processes. Pacific visions can shift climate negotiation towards more inclusive processes, as exemplified by the Talaona Dialogue, launched at COP23 in 2018 under Fiji's presidency to take stock of progress made in implementing the Paris agreement. Inspired by a Pacific traditional practice, Talaona offers an inclusive and transparent format for collaborative discussion and decision-making on climate, based on an exchange of ideas and knowledge through storytelling to foster relationships, gather information, and collectively forge solutions. Talaona allowed to engage local stakeholders in climate discussions in more effective ways, also inspiring the Cities and Regions dialogue within the COP process, as well as informing the negotiation of the first

global stocktake of the Paris agreement presented at COP 28. In a context where the impact of climate change on indigenous knowledge is increasingly documented – affecting traditional agriculture, food systems or medicine or endangering culture-significant species – Pacific insights can also inform the ongoing reflection on addressing non-economic losses related to climate change (Pearson, Jackson and McNamara, 2021).



*Fundamentally the problem of climate change is a problem of arrogance and greed.[...] We have a common origin and destiny and are entrusted to search for insight and perspective, and hopefully for solutions, to the worst problems to have faced man. [...] In this common search, I offer the insights and perspectives of my Samoan indigenous reference or faasamoa. Within it is a worldview that privileges not just the perspective of other men, but of other living beings—of trees, animals, oceans and stars. It is a worldview or life principle that demands humility, sacrifice and respect of our sacred origins. This paradigm comes alive through the poetry, nuances and metaphors of our Samoan language, its legends, rituals and song chants. It tells of the importance of the principles of tapu, equivalence and affinity to overcoming arrogance and greed.*

His Highness Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi,  
Former Head of State of Samoa



Deborah Kolb/Shutterstock.com\*

## **Strengthening the governance of culture**

**Strengthening cultural policy frameworks is the primary focus of the 2022-2032 Pacific Regional Culture Strategy**, aiming to enhance the governance and integrate culture into national development priorities. Countries are progressively ramping up their engagement in the cultural sector, necessitating the development of national policies, legislation and guidelines to safeguard and promote cultural rights and diversity. Bolstering the capacities of national cultural institutions – including as regards risk preparedness – is equally crucial to enable the effective delivery of cultural services. Bold investment in education and training is needed, addressing the needs of public cultural institutions as well as culture and creative ecosystems. Systemic collaboration between public institutions and cultural professionals and practitioners, as well as with CSOs and private sector entities, in the design and implementation of cultural policy is also essential in view of the territorial fragmentation, requiring decentralized, community-driven governance. Enabling cross-sectoral collaborations – notably between culture, trade, environment, employment or

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digital policies – is equally central to forge a genuine Pacific led vision of culture and development, bridging cultural and natural heritage, as well as CCIs. Finally, developing sustainable funding models for the cultural sector is critical, requiring strengthened commitment in national budget allocations for culture, more agile public-private partnerships and enhanced linkages with other policy areas such as climate action, disaster risk management, sustainable agriculture or gender equality.

**The investment in cultural data and statistics stands as another core priority of the 2022-2032 Pacific Regional Culture Strategy**, both as regards the cultural sector itself, as well as culture’s impact on other areas of development among which education, land-use and management, food security, or disaster risk management. The Pacific Ministers of Culture meetings repeatedly underscored the need to prioritize cultural statistics and culture-related knowledge to enable evidence-based public policies, while also ensuring data sovereignty – a shared concern across the region. Strengthened capacity building efforts are needed, targeting both cultural and statistical departments, building on existing sets of indicators, including the UNESCO 2009 Framework for Cultural Statistics and the UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators Framework. The establishment of a regional cultural statistics hub is being considered by SPC to support such efforts (United Nations, 2024). The inclusion of culture in the development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index also opens up further opportunities. Greater investment in cultural data has yielded significant benefits: in Vanuatu, a national well-being survey incorporating cultural elements propelled the cultural sector to the forefront of the country’s sustainable development agenda, and spurred positive institutional advancements, including the establishment of a position of statistician responsible for the culture and justice sectors within the National Statistics Office (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2021).

**Looking forward, the digital transformation brings about new opportunities in the field of culture, while also requiring stronger regulation to secure a rights-based approach.** Despite a persisting digital divide, significant investments have been made over the past decade to develop digital infrastructure across the Pacific, with an increasing number of countries being connected through fiber-optic cables, leading to enhanced broadband access – shifting, for example, from 2% of the population in 2010 to 64% in 2021 in Tonga – and reduced cost of broadband (World Bank, 2023). E-commerce is gaining traction across the region, although market dominance and data inequalities still threaten inclusive development (UNCTAD, 2022). The 2021 Pacific Regional E-commerce strategy identifies “cultural items” – including CCIs, handicraft and textile – within regional comparative advantages, broadening opportunities to reach regional and international markets (PIFS, 2021). However, harnessing such potential requires to invest in building digital skills, to establish protocols and mechanisms to ensure fair monetization benefiting to content creators, as well as to strengthen intellectual property rights including as regards indigenous knowledge. Cross-sectoral policies and regulations will therefore be needed to ensure an inclusive digital transformation of the cultural and creative sector.



# Highlights

The geography of the Pacific Islands, and the history of settlement shaped by mobility and cross-cultural exchanges, have carved distinctive cultural features, marked by cultural and linguistic diversity, intrinsic linkages between communities and their environment and the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in sustaining communities' livelihoods and resilience.

Culture has progressively gained ground in public policies, with a strengthening of cultural policy frameworks, and a trend towards enhanced collaboration between public authorities and CSOs although efforts should be sustained to support capacity building and cross-sectoral collaboration and renew funding mechanisms.

Pacific SIDS have a longstanding commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage – as reflected by the almost unanimous ratification of the UNESCO 2003 and 1972 conventions, despite limited engagement in the UNESCO 1970 and 2001 conventions – and a growing interest is expressed to harness the potential of the creative economy, including through the UNESCO 2005 Convention.

Culture has been a federating component of regional cooperation – as reflected by the early creation of the FESTPAC, SPC's regional strategies and the profiling of culture in other regional frameworks – with regional bodies such as SPC and PIFS playing a critical role to support national cultural policies and harness culture for sustainable development.

Countries of the region express strong aspiration to harness culture to carve a Pacific led vision of sustainable development, shaped by values of relationality, localization and resilience, thus shaping people-centered, context relevant development pathways.

Culture is considered as a high potential sector for economic diversification, fostering youth employment while also sustaining social and environmental impact, including through sustainable or regenerative cultural tourism, or bold engagement in the creative economy – a potential which requires public policy regulation, including in the digital realm, to provide an enabling environment, support fair remuneration and prevent the commodification of Indigenous cultures.

The region's exposure to the effects of climate change and disasters strongly impacts upon cultural heritage, although Indigenous and local knowledge have long provided community resilience and adaptation – leading to Pacific SIDS taking a pioneering role in harnessing culture for disaster risk management, resilience or food security, while also informing the global climate conversation - a leadership which could be expanded in the future, particularly in relation to climate justice and the reflexion on non-economic losses.

The protection of individual and collective cultural rights is a growing area of engagement for Pacific SIDS, focusing particularly on protecting traditional and indigenous knowledge systems – notably in relation to intellectual property and copyright –; fostering equal access to culture and cultural participation, including for a large Pacific diaspora; as well as strengthening the status of artists and cultural professionals, including in the digital environment, to enable fair monetization for content creators.



## Chapter II

# Cultural Policies in the Caribbean SIDS

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**The Caribbean region comprises the largest number of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), encompassing sixteen UNESCO Member States and seven Associate Members.** Language diversity represents a strong asset of the Caribbean SIDS – African, Indian, English, French, Spanish, Dutch expressions and influences and several indigenous languages from Hindi to Guyanese Creole, Sranatonga, Dutch-based Creole, with a large proportion of Indigenous Peoples from Arawak, to Wai Wai, Makushi, Garifuna and Mayan. The historical trajectory of many of these countries is deeply influenced by the colonial era, particularly associated with the transatlantic slave trade. The majority of Caribbean societies have significant populations of African descendants, who have forged a shared history shaped by over three centuries of displacement. This history has profoundly influenced the development of cultural heritage and expressions, deeply intertwined with aspirations for democratic societies and fundamental rights. Following the end of colonial rule, culture emerged as a central element in fostering the development of both national and local cultural identities, and communicating a worldview deeply rooted in the African heritage of much of the Caribbean population. Over time, culture evolved into a vital tool of emancipation, imbuing the sector with a distinct role in Caribbean life and giving rise to unique and diverse forms of intangible cultural heritage and creative expressions, including festivals, poetry, cuisine, and visual arts. Expressions of emancipation through culture and creativity were inherently linked with a sense of self-determination, aimed at addressing a widespread need to reckon with the past and reaffirm newly acquired rights and freedoms.



***Won't you help to sing  
These songs of freedom?  
'Cause all I ever have  
Redemption songs  
Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery  
None but ourselves can free our mind***

**Bob Marley, "Redemption Song", 1979**

*These lyrics of Jamaican singer and musician Bob Marley – taken from a speech given by Jamaican political activist Marcus Garvey – capture the response of people of African descent to centuries of displacement, articulated as a new philosophy at the centre of the Caribbean identity.*

**Many Caribbean SIDS face similar stark environmental vulnerabilities and socio-economic challenges, profoundly exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and of a changing climate.** These challenges include intergenerational poverty, youth migration, widening inequalities, high unemployment, particularly among women and youth, insecurity, gaps in the education system, limited opportunities for economic diversification, and exposure to high frequency and intensity of climate-induced natural hazards, often resulting in widespread disasters and biodiversity loss. As reflected in the Outcome Document of the preparatory meeting in view of the Fourth International Conference on SIDS for the Caribbean, held in August 2023 in Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the sustainable development priorities of SIDS find in culture a strategic sector to foster economic diversification, local growth, and promote livelihoods and decent work. The role of culture in accelerating the development of SIDS has progressively gained traction in the past decades and is equally enshrined in the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action, the 2005 Mauritius Strategy, and the 2014 SAMOA Pathway. These documents are considered sustainable development blueprints for SIDS to strengthen policy investment, including in the field of culture, particularly in heritage management, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, and training and business creation in the CCIs.

**The creation of The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in 1973 represented a turning point for policy investment and dialogue within the region to address development challenges through concerted and unified approaches.** CARICOM encompasses fifteen Member States and five Associate Members, representing an approximate population of 16 million, 60% of whom are under the age of 30 (CARICOM, 2024). It was established to stimulate cohesive approaches towards an inclusive and resilient regional community. Dating from 1995, the Regional Cultural Policy of the CARICOM includes culture as a critical area of focus to empower communities through creativity and self-development. Across the region, the CARICOM Cultural Policy has had a significant influence on the shaping and the strengthening of national cultural policies including through a particular focus on the integration of culture in education; culture's agency for economic diversification and sustainable tourism; CCIs for inclusive growth; and the international outreach of Caribbean culture and know-how. In many national policies of Caribbean SIDS, culture is perceived as a strong lever to promote identity rebuilding, resilience and sustainable development.



*Cultural Policy is to be seen as an instrument that aims at empowering people to be liberated to their creativity and self-development. In the Caribbean Community, this Policy is to be located within the framework of the struggle for the democratic society. [...] Culture is not only the fruit but the root of development and must be considered in every phase and aspect of the development process.*

Regional Cultural Policy of The Caribbean Community, 1995

**Progressively, culture has been advocated as a bedrock for fostering self-determination as well as combating racism and discrimination.** Many countries in the Caribbean recognized its pivotal role in bestowing dignity, ensuring social justice, and empowering communities. Acknowledgment of African and Afro-descendant cultures, as well as the recognition of colonial history and slavery have been supported through international days of observance such as the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture (24 January) and the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade (25 March). Over time, the cultural sector has been regarded as a crucial ally in the education and promotion of respect, diversity, and peace, while also advocating for reparations in line with the stances articulated in the UN Durban Declaration (2001) and the European Union Resolution (2019), which affirm that slavery and the transatlantic slave trade constitute crimes against humanity.

## SIDS IN THE CARIBBEAN

**UNESCO Member States:** Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadine, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.

**UNESCO Associate Members:** Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Montserrat, Sint Maarten.



## The Cultural Policy Landscape

### *Redressing past wrongs, rebuilding identities through culture*

Early cultural policies in the Caribbean SIDS emerge in disparate ways, first as protection and promotion programmes on specific cultural and heritage expressions or sites. While primarily focusing on tangible heritage protection – notably a large number of European-themed architecture – the burgeoning cultural ecosystem then shifted its focus to culture in its broadest sense, serving as a platform for self-discovery, inclusion, and the reclamation of lost identities in an effort to address past wrongs affecting particularly African descendants but also Indigenous Peoples. In 1804, the independence of Haiti paved the way for reclaiming lost identities and promoting individual and collective rights, dignity and integrity. This recognition was further supported by the acknowledgment of creole languages such as Haitian Creole and Papiamentu as national languages alongside Dutch, French, English, and Spanish. Creole languages, developed by the enslaved, progressively gained recognition in the post-independence era, becoming a key pillar for identity rebuilding. Many countries would adopt the “all o we is one” Creole society, whereby much greater emphasis was placed on the shared values of Caribbean people. While culture played a decisive role during the independence era in shaping a new narrative around culture, investment in national cultural policy development and adaptation in Caribbean SIDS remains heterogenous.



**Since 1995, CARICOM's Regional Cultural Policy largely shaped the formulation of national cultural policies for many Caribbean SIDS**, with an accelerated pace in the first decade of the 2000s – such as in Saint Lucia (Ministry of Social Transformation, Culture and Local Government, 1999) Barbados (Ministry of Community Development and Culture, 2010), Dominica (Ministry of Community Development, Gender Affairs and Information, 2007), Jamaica (Culture Division, 2002), Grenada (Grenada Cultural Foundation, 2006), Trinidad and Tobago (Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, 2006) and Saint Kitts and Nevis (Department of Culture, 2011), which encompass strategic directions in terms of heritage protection and living heritage safeguarding. However, a discernible shift is occurring towards increased policy investment, particularly in the CCIs, recognizing their impact as an engine for sustainable economic growth and a mechanism for diversifying economies, improving global competitiveness, and supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship. Over the years, this new trend in cultural policy towards increased investment in CCIs has resulted in policy adaptation, as exemplified by the Creative Economy Policy Framework of Jamaica (2015), as well as in Saint Kitts and Nevis whose related Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Entertainment and Talent Development – established in June 2020 – actively promotes economic resilience of the cultural and creative sector through entrepreneurship. This includes identifying four focus areas as priorities for business development and economic diversification: film and photography, music and entertainment, literary and performing arts, and technology and innovation.

**The growing focus on cultural policy development and adaptation in the Caribbean mirrors the level of the UNESCO Culture Conventions ratification.** All Caribbean SIDS have ratified both the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention and 2003 Convention. However, both the 2003 and 2005 Conventions have had a particular influence on the focus of national policy articulations particularly from a right-perspective. For example, Sint Maarten's National Commission for UNESCO and Department of Culture finalized the territory's first National Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Inventory in 2018. Since 2023, Saint Kitts and Nevis is developing a National ICH Policy – with the international assistance from UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund – which will also include considerations on intellectual protection for artists as well as financing of the cultural and creative sector. In 2022, Cuba adopted the Law 154/2022 on the "Rights of the Author and the Performing Artist", as well as the Resolution 65/2022 "Regulations of the Collective Management Organisations of Rights on Literary and Artistic Creations". Most recently, with the support of the UNESCO Aschberg programme, Belize and Dominican Republic are contributing to the design of of a Regional Policy for the Protection and Promotion of the Status of Artists and Cultural Professionals of SICA.

**The emergence and strengthening of cultural policies across the sub-region were also strongly influenced by other international endeavours**, notably the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies – MONDIACULT, in 1982 and 2022, both hosted by Mexico. Nevertheless, a certain number of Caribbean SIDS have not yet elaborated cultural policies, while many others would benefit from revision or adaptation. Some of the most recent national cultural policies were developed in Belize in 2016, the Cayman Islands in 2017, and Trinidad and Tobago in 2020. In recent years, some countries have engaged in other priority areas of the UNESCO Culture Conventions, such as the 1970 Convention. In 2020, a sub-regional workshop on this Convention and the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects was hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport of Jamaica in Kingston. This aimed to address illicit trafficking of pre-Columbian, religious, and colonial cultural heritage in the Caribbean, as well as the illicit commercialization of underwater cultural heritage recovered from shipwrecks and other submerged structures.



*The creative sector has been historically acknowledged for its contribution to the reclamation of lost and reinvented identities, but also to fight against poverty and unemployment. The cultural industries and heritage economy present [...] a unique and strong global competitive and comparative advantage.*

Ms Donna Greene, Director of Cultural Policy and Research, Barbados National Commission for UNESCO, at MONDIACULT 2022 regional consultation

**While cultural identity remains an important factor in the movement for regional integration, the emergence of the creative economy provides the regional community with a fresh narrative.** By the late 1960s, there was a growing recognition that culture was both a vehicle for defining the identity of a people – particularly promoting African and Afro-descendant cultures – and an accelerator of economic development that has been progressively supported by the growth of cultural events that are ingrained in the social fabric of the Caribbean. For example, the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan (2014-2018) refocused carnivals not only as a social event but also as a lever for economic growth. Among others, the three-month long Crop Over Festival in Barbados, which dates back to the plantation era, marking the end of the harvest, the festival significantly features African-inspired masquerade bands and music genres such as calypso and soca, rooted in African musical traditions. Carnivals, fairs and festivals across the Caribbean, including in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti progressively evolved beyond being local cultural events and developed a regional – and sometimes global – popularity, stimulating more investment in capacity-building and professionalization in the sector. In Jamaica, music festivals such as Reggae Sunsplash helped sustain the livelihoods of many artists, supporting the emergence of CCIs with an international outreach. Today, the festival is one of the most diverse in the world with a mixture of heritage, creative arts, music and masquerade. Economic considerations applied to the cultural and creative sector then prompted a shift in cultural policy, starting in the late 1990s. The impact was particularly strong in the tourism sector, stimulating the development of the tertiary sector of the economy, particularly accommodation and other hospitality businesses catering to the increased number of festivalgoers, thus enhancing local socio-economic development throughout the tourism value chain.

**Since 1989, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy significantly contributed to promoting the mobility of artists as well as improving their socio-economic conditions.** This economic integration movement towards a stronger creative economy took root in the English-speaking Caribbean, beginning with the staging of the first annual Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA) in Guyana in 1972. An embodiment of Caribbean identity, CARIFESTA has been hailed as an inspirational exchange of creative flows across the region while supporting regional solidarity. The first edition attracted the participation of a thousand artists from over thirty Caribbean and Latin American countries, giving expression to their creativity in music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture and literature, among others. In 2015, CARIFESTA was organized in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, bringing artists and audiences from all over the region, providing an opportunity for cultural exchange and representing a strong token of regional solidarity towards the recovery of the cultural and creative sector of the country, which was affected by the 2010

earthquake. Progressively, the creative industries have been viewed as a crucial engine for economic growth and reconstruction in Haiti. In 2017, the country's first music industry mapping exercise was completed with financial support from the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity. More than 1,500 professionals across 35 different cultural domains participated in this mapping exercise.

**In 2006, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) established protocols for the free movement of goods and people, inclusive of cultural workers, goods and services.** In this sense, it seeks to deepen the economic integration of its members while widening its membership to include countries not initially recognized as part of the Anglophone Caribbean SIDS such as Haiti, Suriname, The Bahamas and the Dominican Republic. The CSME provides a regional context in which the creative industries operate, allowing free movement throughout the region without work permits for artists and cultural workers, and creating a larger regional market for goods and services of the sector. The strengthening of the regional market supported the growth of not only the CCIs, but also of intangible cultural expressions – both intrinsically intertwined – providing enhanced opportunities for countries to strengthen an integrated approach of cultural heritage. For example, the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica, aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda, refers to a broadened definition of CCIs to enhance the visibility of the country's distinctive cultural and creative expressions on a global scale, including reggae that was inscribed as intangible cultural heritage in 2018.



*The range of cultural industries (sometimes also known as 'creative industries') include printing, publishing and multimedia, audio-visual, phonographic and cinematographic productions, crafts and design, and also may be extended to include architecture, visual and performing arts, sports, manufacturing of musical instruments, advertising and cultural tourism.*

Vision 2030 Jamaica: National Development Plan, 2009-2030



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**In 2008, the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement and its Protocol on Cultural Cooperation** marked a significant milestone by intertwining with the UNESCO 2005 Convention and striving to incorporate cultural considerations into a trade accord. This agreement, a product of collaboration between CARIFORUM States (comprising 14 CARICOM nations and the Dominican Republic) and the European Union (EU), was signed in October 2008 and provisionally applied since December 2008. The CARIFORUM-EU EPA supersedes the trade provisions outlined in the 2000 Cotonou Agreement, wherein the EU unilaterally extended preferences to the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries in adherence to World Trade Organization (WTO) guidelines. Upon its enactment, the EPA established CARIFORUM as the pioneering regional entity within the ACP to secure a comprehensive agreement with the EU and its Member States. Remarkably, it remains the sole EPA featuring provisions on trade in services. Notably, the CARIFORUM-EU EPA represents a pioneering endeavour in regional trade agreements as it strives to implement Article 16 of the UNESCO 2005 Convention by incorporating specific clauses pertaining to trade in cultural and entertainment services, alongside introducing a dedicated Protocol on Cultural Cooperation (PCC). The primary objective of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA is to streamline market access and establish preferential conditions for Caribbean cultural goods, services, and practitioners.

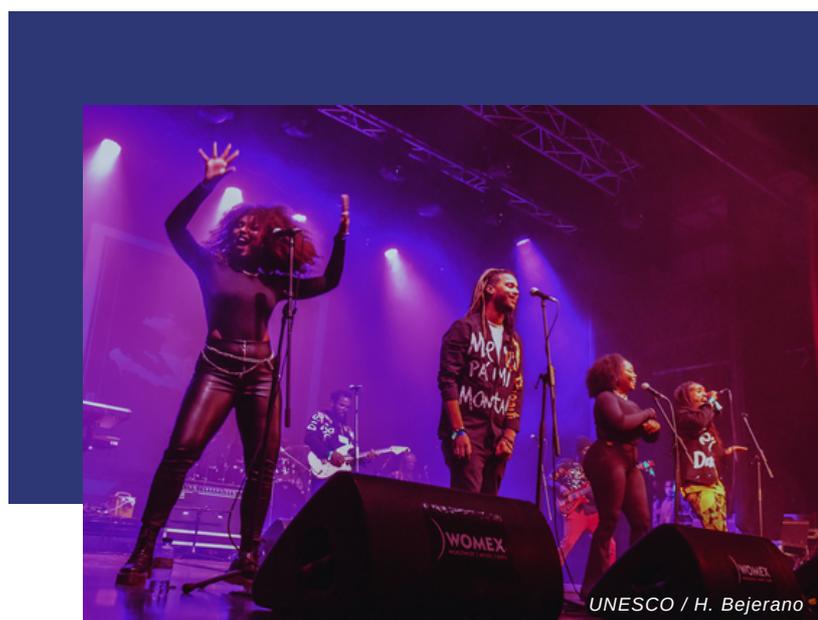
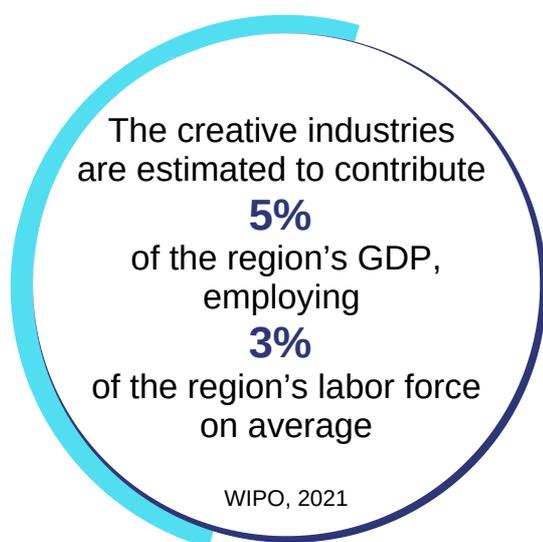


*Developed countries shall facilitate cultural exchanges with developing countries by granting, through the appropriate institutional and legal frameworks, preferential treatment to artists and other cultural professionals and practitioners, as well as cultural goods and services from developing countries.*

Article 16 – Preferential treatment for developing countries of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

**As the creative economy gained traction in policy dialogue as well as competitiveness within the regional market**, the establishment of the Regional Task Force on Cultural Industries in 2008 was mandated by Ministers of Trade and Culture. Its remit was to develop a comprehensive Regional Development Strategy and Action Plan for the cultural industries in CARICOM, endorsed in 2012 and revised in 2019, aiming to strengthen capacity-building, technical assistance, and funding opportunities available to the culture and creative sector in the Caribbean. Over the years, recommendations by the Regional Task Force were made particularly regarding incentives, financing the cultural and creative sector, as well as registration, classification and free movement of artists and cultural workers. To further develop an enabling environment for creative industries, CARICOM and the Caribbean Export Development Agency (CEDA) established the Caribbean Creative Industries Management Unit (CCIMU) in 2016. In 2017, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) created the Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) to support the development of the region's creative industries recognizing their contribution to GDP as well as capacity to spur innovation and knowledge transfer across all sectors of the economy.

The creative industries are estimated to contribute 5% of the region's GDP, employing 3% of the region's labor force on average (WIPO, 2021). However, these figures fail to capture the varied levels of development across the region's creative sectors. Certain countries boast greater export capacities and enjoy more exposure to international markets compared to others. For instance, according to data published by WIPO, Saint Lucia stands out as the Caribbean's best performing country with a copyright contribution to GDP reaching 8%. At the national level, efforts have been equally accelerated, such as in Guyana, which reported in its 2023 Voluntary National Review that between 2019 and 2023, the government distributed \$80 million Guyanese dollars through the Cultural and Creative Industries Grants initiative to support local culture development and enhance the creation of new cultural products and services. Sixty-five individuals benefitted and received support for Indigenous product production, strengthening infrastructures, training and community tourism development.



Similarly, UNESCO significantly supported the impulse of the creative economy through policy investment in Caribbean SIDS, notably thanks to the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This led to the harnessing of carnivals and festivals to cultural policies that further integrate creativity, innovation, and popular culture. CCIs thus progressively became central in policy deliberations, notably supporting the mobility of artists, monetization and export of cultural products, as well as local tourism and economic growth. Barbados' Tourism Master Plan 2014-2023 has targeted creative and performing arts as a major subsector for economic growth. Through the Jamaica – UNESCO – UE project (2018- 2022), Jamaica elaborated a Creative Economy Act in 2022, which streamlines policies and the administration of CCIs. Furthermore, the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM and the European Union in 2008 to implement article 16 of the UNESCO 2005 Convention stands as a good practice, making a case for preferential treatment to cultural professionals and practitioners, as well as cultural goods and services, from developing countries. Since 2010, the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity has devoted over 9% of its funding to SIDS, representing fifteen projects and more than \$1 million USD granted to eleven SIDS to foster dynamic national cultural sectors, including developing a cultural policy in Grenada, carrying out a cultural policy reform in Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and measuring the economic contribution of the CCIs in Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Lucia's socio-economic development.

The UNESCO programme “Transcultura: integrating Cuba, the Caribbean and the European Union through Culture and Creativity”, launched in 2020 and funded by the European Union, also represents a major initiative in the Caribbean to strengthen regional integration and cultural cooperation between the Caribbean and the European Union. Covering seventeen SIDS, it has notably created the first-ever Caribbean Cultural Training Hub, offering online and presential courses in relation to the CCIs. Combining the professionalization of the cultural and creative sectors with the creation of opportunities, it also supports the creation and scaling up of cultural businesses (including through capacity-building on grant proposal writing for cultural projects, mentorship and a grants scheme), the implementation of cultural cooperation initiatives between European and Caribbean cultural institutions, and the development of cultural and creative tourism. As of 1 May 2024, over 1,500 young professionals aged 18 to 35 have benefited from the “Transcultura” programme.



“ The best thing to come out of this training course was to discover the rich diversity of the Caribbean sub-region but also the many opportunities in the cultural sector on a global scale. For me, Transcultura, in a nutshell, gives hope.

François Nedje Jacques (Haiti), cultural manager, beneficiary of the “Transcultura” programme

Similarly, the partnership between CARICOM, the University of the West Indies (UWI) and UNESCO, with the Financial Contribution of the European Union and the Support of the Organisation of ACP States, aims to secure funding through the “Creative Caribbean: An Ecosystem of Play for Growth and Development” mechanism to stimulate inclusive, diversified, and sustainable growth of the creative economy. Through the grant-making process, the project seeks to establish and reinforce dynamic interrelationships in CCIs to increase the creation and production of globally competitive goods and services, as well as employment opportunities. It aims to expand skills that enable beneficiaries to self-generate cash flow to fuel their growth and increase access to financing through innovative mechanisms that allow co-financing and reduce the Caribbean’s cultural operators’ dependency on international financing.

## Addressing structural gaps in the cultural sector



*SIDS are constrained mainly by factors such as high limitations on natural, human and technical resource basis, thus compounding the challenges of economic and climate change vulnerabilities. This translates into many Small Islands lacking an ecosystem for developing and supporting the creative and cultural industries, which require significant financing. Shortage of skilled personnel, low levels of training, weak marketing and branding all contribute to this phenomenon.*

Hon. Samal Duggins, Minister of Agriculture, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Cooperatives, Small Business, Entrepreneurship, Sports and the Creative Economy – Saint Kitts and Nevis.

**The cultural and creative sector has progressively emerged as an opportunity for economic diversification**, notably enabling rural and urban young people to sustain their livelihoods and gain stability. This trend has prompted countries to increase investment in the sector, notably through the implementation of stimulus packages for creatives, many of whom are self-employed. In recent years, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jamaica made available USD\$580,000 to the entertainment sector as of April 2022, Saint Lucia has developed a three-month grant for creatives, while Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have instituted a monthly stipend, either on a one-off basis or for a maximum of three months. The accelerated creation of incentives confirms a growing recognition at the policy level of the socio-economic impact of the cultural and creative sector, as well as its ties with ancillary industries. However, implementing change remains a challenge, as the cultural sector continues to rely heavily on subsidies and remains under-capacitated and under-funded. Equally, the lack of monitoring systems as well as incomplete evidence-based data significantly impede the financial sustainability and economic resilience of the sector.

**Overall, COVID-19 has prompted cultural policy dialogue, allowing for the identification of pre-existing vulnerabilities and systemic structural gaps** challenging the sustainability and resilience of the sector. These include scarcity of financial schemes, a high prevalence of informality, a paucity of data, heterogenous development of digital transformation, as well as a lack of capacity building, among others. Certain groups – Afro-descendent artists, Indigenous creators, women and youth – who are highly engaged within the festival economy, have been

particularly vulnerable to the shocks of the pandemic, which unveiled the importance of the sector in both economic and social terms. The economy of Caribbean SIDS is closely linked to the tourism income generated during the time of festivals and carnivals, totalling about 30% of their GDP (ECLAC, 2021). However, these major festivals mainly rely on micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, many of them could not survive the COVID-19's shockwave. Yet it is difficult to get a full and accurate picture of the impact of the cultural and creative sector as related data – in particular the contribution of festivals and events to the economy – is often listed under to the tourism sector only. By contrast, the crisis brought to light the opportunities of the CCIs for countries that are transitioning to service economy and are faced with significant intergenerational poverty, urban violence, and unemployment.



*The [COVID-19] pandemic has underscored the need for SIDS to embrace digitalization and economic diversification and to mitigate the impact of external shocks. As the economy gradually recovers, Jamaica and the broader Caribbean must find ways to preserve, protect and fully prepare their entire cultural ecosystem to not only recover, but to thrive, which includes protecting the cultural and creative industries.*

Aniceto Rodríguez Ruiz, Head of Cooperation of the European Union Delegation to Jamaica, Belize, Turks and Caicos Islands, Bahamas, and the Cayman Islands, February 2022

**Across the sub-region, the digital divide represents a major development challenge for the cultural and creative sector, notably linked to a lack of digital skills and of regulatory frameworks.** While cultural and creative operators have progressively switched to digital formats on social media and streaming platforms – thus broadening access to online cultural content and expanding outreach to new audiences at the regional and global levels – limitations posed by the access to Internet, particularly in rural areas, the gap in digital literacy and skills – impacting both teachers and learners –, the language divide in Internet use, as well as the lack of regulatory frameworks, including for the protection of intellectual property rights, significantly hamper the development of the creative digital economy. Regional and sub-regional programmes have contributed to building digital skills, notably the Caribbean Examination Council who launched the first Caribbean Digital Media Syllabus in 2014 to develop skillsets in digital content creation and master digital media, particularly targeting creators, animators, and graphic designers. In 2017, CARICOM Heads of Government approved the Single ICT Space Project, which seeks to create a borderless ICT-enabled space that fosters economic, social, and cultural integration. Furthermore, the International Creative Exchange Caribbean (ICEC), launched by the South-South Collective in December 2020, provided online training for business stakeholders from the cultural and creative sectors in the Caribbean to learn about export strategies and identify market opportunities in Europe and Asia. The initiative is led by a business-to-business collaboration platform based in Jamaica. Yet, to sustain the digital creative economy, the implementation of regulatory frameworks is needed to support the sustainable production and consumption of cultural and creative services and goods, as well as to support monetization and further investment in capacity building of cultural professionals and creatives in the digital realm.

## Culture for sustainable development: an overview

### *Strengthening intersectoral and multistakeholder governance*

**Even when not explicitly mentioned in national development plans, culture is increasingly recognized as cutting across other development domains** that are critical in the Caribbean context such as poverty eradication, inequality reduction, social inclusion, gender equality, environmental sustainability, economic diversification and growth. Historically, very few linkages were made between culture and other public policy domains, and ministries of culture sparingly cooperated with other line ministries, notably except for Cuba, where the culture sector has long been integrated within a broader governance system. More recently, Jamaica's Vision 2030 is among the clearest articulations of culture as a key pillar of broader development prospects in the sub-region. Faced with high levels of inequality, culture –CCIs, in particular – is considered by the country as an essential lever for ending poverty (SDG 1) as well as for reducing inequalities (SDG 10), while encouraging social inclusion, reflecting the development imperatives in the Caribbean. Beyond the strong integrated approach to culture in all its dimensions, the Belize National Cultural Policy (2016-2026) equally features explicit intersections between culture and sustainable tourism, poverty eradication, youth empowerment and environment sustainability. Furthermore, Antigua and Barbuda developed a Cultural Heritage (Protection) Bill in 2016, based on a UNESCO Model Act, that aligns with both the SIDS Agenda and the SDGs. Likewise, at the global level, advocacy efforts on culture's agency for sustainable development have gained momentum towards the shaping of the next global agenda for sustainable development. In May 2023, the Group of 77 and China, under the chairmanship of Cuba, adopted a declaration at the meeting of ministers of culture, which further recognizes culture as a global public good and called for a specific culture goal in the post-2030 sustainable development agenda, echoing the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration.

**Across the Caribbean, multistakeholder and participatory governance mechanisms are gaining traction with a view to implementing effective change addressing needs of local communities, particularly of women and youth.** In recent years, many countries in the Caribbean actively involve youth in decision-making processes, including through youth councils, advisory committees, and by supporting youth-led initiatives. In this respect, Jamaica has created a Youth Advisory Council within its National Culture and Creative Industries Unit to enable young people within the sector to have a direct line of communication with the Ministry of Culture. Multistakeholder approaches are also visible at the regional level, with initiatives such as the twenty-member Task Force on Cultural Industries. Mandated by both the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) and the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), this task force comprises representatives from a wide cross-section of relevant sectors, including culture, industry, government, trade and finance, educational institutions, the private sector, and representatives of regional organisations such as the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Secretariat, Caribbean Export, the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM), and the CARICOM Secretariat. Other recent examples include the Culture Division of Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, which has equally strengthened multistakeholder engagement with cultural organisations, community groups, artists, and art-based NGOs. Additionally, the Saint Kitts and Nevis Sustainable Destination Council established a multi-stakeholder advisory committee to the Ministry of Tourism to facilitate public-private partnerships, as well as with communities, to ensure that tourism development in the country benefits the environment, culture, heritage and community livelihoods.

**Heritage development and interpretation strategies that depart from the historical legacy also represents a strong lever towards encouraging multistakeholder engagement, particularly involving youth participation and innovative approaches.** Interesting initiatives of UNESCO World Heritage properties are shifting the narrative, such as the Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison World Heritage property in Barbados. This site is often considered the first port of call for those who made it through the trans-Atlantic journey and serves as an important example of how heritage safeguarding—including the acknowledgment of dark historical chapters—can be conscientiously linked with sustainable tourism development. Since its inscription, public information campaigns, in collaboration with schools and the Barbados Museum, have been key to engaging a diversity of actors, from policymakers to heritage bearers and students, in the co-creation of a new narrative about the site. This includes highlighting the critical role of their ancestors as the craftspeople who built the property. By fostering this sense of inclusive and participatory approach in the history of a place, opportunities have opened for Barbadians to take ownership in the development of their heritage and further build intersectoral and multistakeholder cooperation. Furthermore, many of the SIDS show also a strong interest in the protection and research of their underwater cultural heritage. After Haiti (2014) and Madagascar (2015), the Dominican Republic has requested in 2024 a mission of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body of the UNESCO 2001 Convention. Trinidad and Tobago received in November 2024 a practical training. More capacity building and employment in this area is however needed, especially also to foster responsible bio-cultural tourism and the inclusion of UCH in Marine Protected Areas.



## **Advancing urban revitalization and resilience**

**Cities in Caribbean SIDS face multifaceted challenges** including rapid urbanization, exposure to the impacts of a changing climate, increasing demographics, high levels of poverty, urban violence, as well as rising demands for education and employment opportunities, among others. Throughout the sub-region, many cities were established during the sixteenth century in coastal areas, serving colonial imperatives such as defence, maritime commerce, and the plantation

economy. With the gradual abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, the labour force migrated to neighbouring villages and coastal cities, perpetuating socio-economic disparities rooted in the spatial division between areas shaped by colonial legacies and those influenced by voluntary and enslaved labour. Over the past century, informal settlements have burgeoned around major urban hubs, underscoring the historical stratification of Caribbean cities, characterized by a complex interplay of overlapping historical strata and an urbanization surge primarily driven by rural-to-urban migration. Poverty and urban violence remain prominent challenges in many cities in the sub-region, with some ranking among the highest in the world for homicide rates.

**Rural-urban migration as well as urban sprawl have increasingly become major issues in Caribbean cities**, with urban centres experiencing rapid growth often accompanied by high levels of poverty and insecurity, especially in large informal settlements. Consequently, culture-led revitalization of public spaces has emerged as a pivotal element within urban regeneration strategies across the sub-region. The restoration of central plazas frequently catalyses broader revitalization efforts in surrounding areas. These plazas are increasingly recognized as strategic venues for hosting cultural events, fostering the development of a new urban culture. In addition, many cities in Caribbean SIDS exhibit underutilized downtown areas, particularly noticeable during evenings, including within the UNESCO Creative Cities such as Nassau (Bahamas) and Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago). These cities have recently embarked on urban revitalization endeavours, integrating elements of cultural heritage into their development strategies. In 2021, Port of Spain notably initiated the development of music zones and a walk of fame in collaboration with its National Academy of Performing Arts, exemplifying a shift towards human-centred urban planning and regeneration through culture. Furthermore, historic urban centres face significant pressures, often resulting in neglect due to competing priorities and needs. Recognizing the imperative to safeguard these historic areas within a sustainable development framework, Suriname launched the Paramaribo Urban Rehabilitation Programme to revitalize its World Heritage property, while Grenada established a conservation zone for the historic district of its capital, St. George. The Convent of Santa Clara, as part of the Old Havana and its Fortification System World Heritage property (Cuba), is undergoing major rehabilitation and will become the Santa Clara College for Training in the Arts and Restoration Trades of Cuba and the Caribbean. World Heritage cities not only contribute vernacular wisdom to promote sustainable use of natural resources but also serve as hotbeds of innovation and creativity in transitioning towards more responsible production and consumption patterns. Moreover, the preservation of historic urban centres and other heritage sites serves as a catalyst for cultural tourism expansion in the region while simultaneously safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

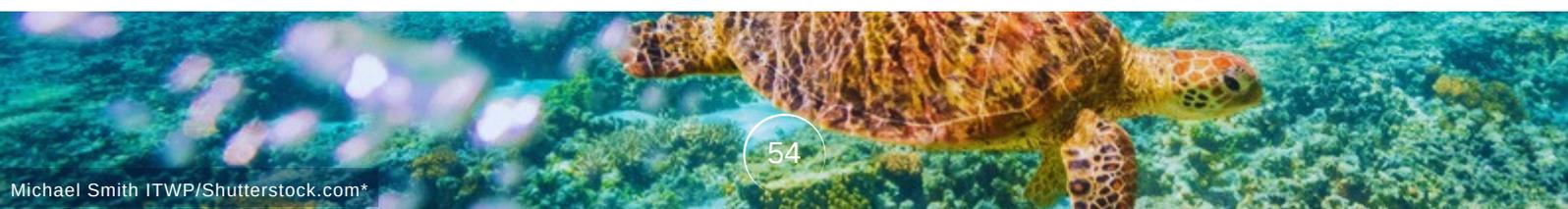
**In the face of the increasing frequency and intensity of natural hazards – the impacts of which are disproportionately affecting urban areas in Caribbean SIDS – culture and creativity progressively became major sources of resilience.** Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most disaster-prone region in the world with 190 million people affected by 1,534 disasters from 2000 to 2022 (OCHA, UNDRR, 2023), a situation that is being exacerbated by climate change particularly in the cities of Caribbean SIDS. While the history of urbanization has been strongly affected by earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis, these unpredictable natural phenomena have produced a culture of resilience, which is expressed in both tangible and intangible heritage. In recent years, cities in Caribbean SIDS are further investing in culture and creativity towards building more sustainable resource use patterns as well as transformative strategies for the inclusion of communities. Approximately half of the countries in the sub-region have mentioned linkages between culture and sustainable cities (SDG 11) into

their Voluntary National Reviews (UNESCO, 2023), highlighting the various ways in which the culture sector can address systemic urban issues, notably by creating opportunities for income generation through the cultural and creative sector, as exemplified by the growing number of Caribbean SIDS members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, including Nassau (Bahamas), Havana and Trinidad (Cuba), Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Jacmel (Haiti), Kingston (Jamaica), Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago). The UNESCO project on 'Intangible Heritage and Creativity for Sustainable Cities', launched in 2023, equally identifies income-generating living heritage practices, which are key to the sustainable development of the communities, such as traditional crafts, performing arts, as well as construction-related practices and traditional occupations.



### *Culture, a renewable energy for climate action*

**The Caribbean SIDS are among the five most globally important biodiversity hotspots, boasting four different forest types and a variety of coastal and marine ecosystems.** The sub-region includes about 10% of the world's coral reefs, including the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System. This reef complex is the largest in the Atlantic-Caribbean region, representing the second largest reef system globally, and providing vital habitat for numerous threatened marine species. From 2009 to 2018, the property was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to multiple and disproportionate impacts of climate change, including coral bleaching, more severe storms, and rising sea levels, resulting from increased sea temperatures and acidification. Belize achieved several targets during this period, including the adoption of a permanent oil moratorium aimed at safeguarding the future of its reefs and the livelihoods of the 200,000 citizens who depend on this ecosystem. However, many marine World Heritage properties in the Caribbean SIDS remain vulnerable to bleaching events, which are increasing at an alarming rate. Experts warn that unless CO2 emissions are drastically reduced, coral reefs are likely to disappear by 2100.



The Caribbean region is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events such as hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, droughts, and volcanic eruptions. Climate change exacerbates these occurrences, heightening the vulnerability of countries' economies. Projections indicate that, due to climate change, annual losses associated solely with tropical cyclone winds could increase by as much as US\$1.4 billion by 2050 (CDEMA, 2018) in the Caribbean. Moreover, sea level rise has accelerated, averaging two to four centimetres per decade over the past thirty-three years, posing risks to the region's freshwater resources and its predominantly coastal population, heavily reliant on tourism and agriculture. In September 2017, two Category 5 hurricanes (Irma and Maria) struck within a month, causing approximately \$71 billion USD in damages across Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Sint Maarten, the British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Jamaica, and the Bahamas, among others. The recurrent occurrence of extreme weather significantly impacts the culture sector. In 2017, the cancellation of the Dominica World Creole Music Festival following a hurricane incurred an estimated cost of USD 2.3 million. Amidst this backdrop, governments are actively updating Disaster Risk Management (DRM) legislation, early warning systems, and recovery plans, including those tailored to the culture sector to enhance its resilience. UNESCO, in collaboration with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and CARICOM members, convened a workshop in 2020 to develop a sub-regional Caribbean Plan of Action for Disaster Resilience and Recovery of the Culture Sector supported thereon by three consecutive decisions of the CARICOM Regional Cultural Committee. Furthermore, strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation have been implemented at several World Heritage properties, including the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park (Jamaica), Pitons volcanoes (Saint Lucia), Historic Area of Willemstad (Curaçao), and Brimstone Hill Fortress (Saint Kitts and Nevis). Since 2015, through the Heritage Emergency Fund, UNESCO supported eight Caribbean SIDS – Haiti, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Belize, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines – in preparing for and responding to natural and human induced disasters affecting culture, including through the collection of baseline data of the Culture Sector, conducting of Post-Disaster Needs Assessment of the Culture Sector and capacity building.



The Caribbean includes about **10%** of the world's coral reefs

UNESCO 2017

Unless CO2 emissions are drastically reduced, coral reefs are likely to disappear by 2100

**The havoc wrought by cyclones and hurricanes in recent years in Caribbean SIDS threatens the traditional way of life of communities.** While the traditional knowledge of these societies, developed over centuries through interaction with their natural surroundings, is under threat, all aspects of their intangible cultural heritage – values, oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, and festive events – are in jeopardy. This phenomenon significantly weakens communities' ability to draw on their cultural resources to fight against climate change and adapt to its consequences. In extreme cases, whole communities are often forced to migrate, abandoning their cultural heritage both built and living. Against this backdrop, the cumulative local knowledge systems, particularly Indigenous cultures, of Caribbean SIDS, enshrine a wellspring of wisdom for sustainable practices, pathways for recovery, as well as for disaster risk reduction and management, recognizing the deep connections among communities, culture, knowledge and the natural environment. Another issue is the impact of sea level rise on underwater and coastal cultural heritage. The loss of many thousands of sites is expected in the years to come.



*Maya ancestral climate observation, honed over millennia, is still practiced today: Indigenous farmers predict rain by watching flood flies and black army ants, and listening to howler monkeys. Cicadas announce the coming of the dry season, likewise, heralded when the cotton trees drop their leaves. If the Maya see the moon surrounded by a ring of clouds at 8 p.m., rain is certain the following day—unless there is a rainbow.*

Ms Froyla Tzalam, Indigenous representative and expert, Mopan and Q'eqchi Maya, Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management, Belize

**Among other examples highlighted during a UNESCO workshop held in Georgetown (Guyana) in 2019 on mobilizing indigenous and local knowledge solutions, the resilience of traditionally built houses to extreme weather was particularly emphasized,** notably by Belize, Cuba and Dominica. Furthermore, traditional local knowledge systems, as documented by the UNESCO Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme, provide a large and complex body of knowledge towards climate adaptation and mitigation. This knowledge has been enriched over many generations and is rooted in direct observations, empirical experiences, cultural and spiritual beliefs, and practices. One noteworthy organisation is the Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM), formed by Maya and Garifuna communities in southern Belize, which works towards creating synergies between traditional observation methods and climate science, as well as collecting culturally sensitive data to inform climate change policy.

**Caribbean SIDS are progressively integrating culture and creativity within their climate, environmental sustainability, and resilience policies and strategies.** This growing integration also reflects enhanced community engagement in the design and implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes. Currently Bahamas and Belize are integrating the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage into disaster risk reduction strategies, helping communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies through a tailored capacity-building approach. Another example is the Barbados 'Roofs to Reefs' programme, launched in 2021, spans several development domains and is rooted in community-based approaches. It notably utilizes crochet handicraft to showcase the opportunities available with renewable energy while educating participants on environmental issues such as marine pollution and coral reef degradation. Efforts toward greening the festival economy are also underway through enhanced

public and private cooperation. In many SIDS Caribbean hosting large-scale festivals and carnivals, several events – run by governmental and private sector's entities – have implemented park-and-ride options and reduced or eliminated single-use plastics and plastic-based glitter, significantly reducing environmental footprints. On the other hand, disaster risk reduction plans and economic recovery and rebuilding plans need to further integrate the ecological impact of the cultural and creative sector, as exemplified by the Caribbean Plan of Action for Disaster Resilience and Recovery of the Culture Sector (UNESCO-CARICOM-Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency), as well as the increased integration of culture into the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment framework.

## Looking ahead: Opportunities for policy engagement

### | *Shaping a resilient tourism sector through culture*



Stairway on Hiking trail to the Boiling Lake in the Commonwealth of Dominica  
Joseph Thomas Photography/Shutterstock.com\*

Tourism stands as one of the Caribbean's major economic sectors, with approximately **25 million** visitors contributing over **\$58 billion USD**, representing around **14%** of its total GDP

WTTC  
2020

**Caribbean SIDS have a high economic dependence on travel and tourism.** Tourism stands as one of the Caribbean's major economic sectors, with approximately 25 million visitors contributing over \$58 billion USD, representing around 14% of its total GDP (WTTC, 2020), making it one of the sub-regions with the highest economic contributions from tourism globally. However, the impact of COVID-19 on the region's economy has been significant. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) reported a loss of US\$33.9 billion in 2020 due to the pandemic. The contribution of the Caribbean Travel & Tourism sector to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) experienced a notable decline of 58%, surpassing the global average. Specifically, the region's Travel & Tourism GDP dropped from USD\$58.4 billion (14.1%) in 2019 to USD\$24.5 billion (6.4%) in 2020. This heavy reliance on international travel coupled with insufficient mobility mechanisms within the region, further heightened the vulnerability of Caribbean countries. Countries within the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), such as Grenada, experienced a decline of 65.5% in Travel and Tourism GDP contributions. Similarly, Saint Lucia witnessed a steep decline of 71.7 percent, Dominica 64.6%, Saint Kitts and Nevis 72.3%, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 67% (WTTC, 2020).

**Cultural tourism, while offering economic opportunities, has, at times, led to adverse effects** such as exacerbating the deterioration of local heritage and marginalizing Indigenous communities, thereby diminishing authenticity through excessive commercialization. The phenomenon of gentrification in urban cores has frequently displaced low-income residents into informal settlements, propelled by escalating property values driven by tourist demand, particularly prevalent in the Caribbean. It is imperative for tourism initiatives to be culturally sensitive and contribute to urban revitalization efforts. Across the sub-region, despite being a significant source of employment, the current trajectory of tourism often diverges from sustainable development principles. Indeed, tourism-centric strategies have sometimes distorted the original function of historic city centres, transforming them into static showcases, a process commonly referred to as ‘museumification’. Mass tourism in certain locales poses a threat to both the physical landscape and the preservation of local customs and traditions. In the Caribbean context, both tangible and intangible heritage have frequently been commodified for tourist consumption. In some instances, artificial historical settings have been fabricated, catering to cruise-related activities, often perpetuating colonial narratives to align with visitor expectations. The sustainable management of tourism-related ventures thus remains a pressing challenge that warrants urgent attention.

**Some countries in Caribbean SIDS are progressively investing in alternative and community-based initiatives to enhance the resilience of the tourism sector.** For example, the Jamaica Community Tourism Portal connects travellers with authentic cultural experiences hosted by local communities. Additionally, cultural tourism linked to intangible cultural heritage, in particular, holds significant potential for diversifying its offerings to tourists by promoting culinary experiences, festivals, and immersion in local cultural heritage, as opposed to the mass tourism paradigm. Many of the elements of Caribbean SIDS that are listed on UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity revolve around festive occasions and performing arts, already contributing to sustainable cultural tourism and the creative sector, such as the renowned Festivity of Las Parrandas in central Cuba. In 2020, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) developed the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework (CSTPF) to guide sustainable tourism development in the region. This framework includes strategies for preserving and promoting cultural heritage and the creative arts. Notably, the framework emphasizes the sustainable management of tangible cultural heritage assets through the implementation of standards for site management, guidelines for visitors and user-generated fees, as well as the management of intangible cultural heritage through enhanced support for know-how safeguarding, without compromising the originality and integrity of living expressions. Creative tourism’s contribution lies in its correlation with heritage assets, facilitating the transition from site-specific economies to broader territorial economies. In 2022, the UNESCO Transcultura programme conducted a study that mapped cultural and creative resources with tourism potential, aiming to illustrate this interconnectedness.



*Culture and heritage are essential facets of a destination’s authenticity and thus uniqueness. Cultural heritage assets as part of the tourism product allows differentiation and enhances the diversity of the tourism product offerings. However, it is important that these assets are sustainably managed and conserved. In order that the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage assets are preserved, measures should be in place to ensure responsible use.*

## Culture for inclusion, resilience and fundamental rights

Across the sub-region, national cultural policies continue to be shaped by a sense of shared identity and self-determination, with the protection of, and access to, culture representing a high priority for several countries to promote both local and Caribbean values. For instance, in Cuba, after the 1959 Revolution, the focus was placed on establishing cultural institutions that promote fair access to culture, exemplified by the creation of *Casas de Cultura* (Culture Houses, in English) in many communities. In the same vein, Indigenous Peoples' cultures and languages have gained increased recognition within cultural policies, notably in Belize, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.



*Our Garifuna, Mopan, Q'eqchi' and Yucatán sisters and brothers are part of the Belizean family, adding diversity of languages, cultures, knowledge, and ways of living. However, the struggles of Indigenous Peoples are far from over [...] they continue to stand in defence of their lands, relationships, and ways of life, as they have always done. Their resistance ranges from legal struggles to language and cultural revitalization, and their struggles mirror the fight for positive development that all Belizean engage in on a daily basis.*

Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia, Minister of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs of Belize

**A major socio-economic challenge in the Caribbean is the gender equality gap**, which remains significant across the region. Overall, cultural policies of Caribbean SIDS lack references to culture's alignment with gender equality and women's empowerment. The culture sector also exhibits numerous gender-based inequalities, stigmatizations, and discrimination against women. Traditional gender roles persist strongly across the sub-region, primarily due to the legacy of inequalities rooted in plantation societies, presenting a key challenge to advancing gender equality. Certain Caribbean cultural expressions, particularly in music, perpetuate these stereotypical gender roles. Women not only face confinement to specific gendered roles by society and education systems but also encounter challenges in participating at decision-making levels and accessing funding and professional networks, where they are often underrepresented or marginalized.

**The culture sector must further promote inclusivity, supporting right-based approaches, and the empowerment of women, youth and other vulnerable groups.** It has the potential to bolster support for initiatives that highlight role models and encourage increased participation in the sector, advocating for a new narrative around gender equality and youth engagement. Among other examples, the Heritage Education Network Belize published "A Guide to Empowering Women in Culture" in 2021, featuring innovative women-led entrepreneurship initiatives. One highlighted initiative is MayaBags, a social enterprise collaborating with young Maya women to produce and market modern bags crafted from traditional hand-woven textiles. This effort fosters capacity-building and amplifies women's voices and empowerment. Similarly, the UNESCO "Transcultura" programme supports young women entrepreneurs in the region by offering entrepreneurial training, contributing to the development of a more vibrant cultural and creative ecosystem grounded in gender equality. Another example is the Joint SDG Fund project "Building

Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”, which aims to facilitate the sustainable economic empowerment of women, youth and people with disabilities by strengthening their access to financial mechanisms, knowledge sharing and capacity building, particularly in areas of agribusiness, tourism and CCIs.

### ***Leveraging the nexus between culture and education***

**Strengthening the nexus between culture and education is emerging as a policy priority across the region.** In recent years, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Jamaica have intensified their efforts towards providing technical and vocational education and training in the cultural and creative sector, from cultural entrepreneurship to cultural management. However, there is limited incorporation of culture and arts education across all levels, from pre-primary to tertiary. The transmission of the sub-region’s cultural heritage predominantly occurs through non-formal education channels, constraining the sector’s potential for growth. A noteworthy exception to this pattern is Cuba, which has a tradition of research and educational excellence in the field of heritage conservation as well as numerous arts and culture schools that foster a highly skilled creative workforce. As an example, six out of the seven high-level educational and training institutions which are member of the Caribbean Cultural Training Hub established in the context of the Transcultura programme are based in Cuba. Elsewhere, the lack of formal educational connections is partially offset by cultural festivals offering training opportunities for young artists, as seen in events such as the Barbados National Independence Festival of the Creative Arts and Jamaica’s National Festival of the Arts. Nevertheless, advancing professionalism and innovation in the sector calls for enhanced educational linkages and the establishment of standardized professional norms. For example, regional capacity-building programmes, such as the Caribbean Capacity Building Programme (CCBP) for World Heritage implemented from 2004 to 2014, had structural impacts on national public policies, while also expanding networking opportunities at the regional level. Furthermore, the Cultural Ocean Literacy could be better connected to the protection of cultural and biodiversity sites. UCH needs to be enshrined in Marine Protected Areas and marine Spatial Planning, and be included within school curricula.

**At the XIV Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Education and Culture of the Educational and Cultural Coordination of the Central American Integration System (CECC/SICA),** UNESCO emphasized the vital importance of fostering a cohesive connection between the education and culture sectors to advance education for sustainable development and global citizenship. UNESCO urged CECC/SICA Member States to strengthen intersectoral approaches that link culture and education within their educational frameworks. In 2020, CECC/SICA Member States adopted a Strategy aimed at articulating the functional relationship between culture and education within the social context of the SICA Region. This Strategy integrates UNESCO technical guidelines and, through an intersectoral approach, seeks to amplify the contributions of education and culture to sustainable development and regional integration, notably by strengthening institutional capacity-building to formalize the sector and improve its access to social security.

**Furthermore, recognizing the socio-economic impact of strengthening the links between culture and education,** local academic institutions, such as in Trinidad and Tobago, have proactively established mechanisms to refine the country’s educational programmes on cultural heritage, as well as on the creative economy, including through the adoption of national music

curricula in schools. The University of the West Indies (UWI) and, more recently, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), have introduced a bachelor's and master's degree programmes in Carnival Studies. These programmes focus on thematic areas including Creative Enterprise Management and Entrepreneurship, Cultural Studies, Mas Design and Carnival Research, Ethnomusicology, as well as Calypso and Pan Studies (UWI, 2009 & UTT, 2018).

**Empowering youth through culture and arts education can position them at the forefront of transitioning towards more sustainable economies.** Achieving this goal requires fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through initiatives such as business incubators, financial support for young entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship training across various cultural and creative fields. Additionally, it entails improving access to lifelong, context- and content- relevant education, high-quality education and skills development programmes, from formal to informal settings, including through museums, that are aligned with the dynamic requirements of the global job market. Such approach must be enshrined in public policy, as exemplified by the Belize Bill of Cultural Rights of its National Cultural Policy 2016-2026, which calls upon all stakeholders to uphold a right to holistic formal and informal education including arts and culture. Similarly, in 2022, Guyana incepted the Youth Culture Camps to provide children and young people with educational experiences on heritage, art, music, dance and their ties to sustainable development. Across the sub-region, there is a growing recognition of the impact of culture and arts education on sustainable development, particularly through museums and other cultural institutions. They notably reinforce citizens' understanding and ownership of their role in history as change agents, as highlighted by the 2020 CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice. The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education adopted by Ministers of Culture and of Education in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in February 2024, shall also bring a new impetus for increased policy investment in culture and arts education.



# Highlights

Regional Caribbean integration supports policy development, adaptation and investment at the national level by ensuring that cultural policies are integrated and remain relevant, effective and responsive to an ever-changing cultural and creative sector as well as to reflect emerging challenges notably pertaining to the impact of the digital transformation and sustainable financing.

Policy efforts towards promoting cultural diversity involves acknowledging both the shared history of the Caribbean and the diverse identities and cultures within it, notably including Indigenous Peoples, as well as ensuring the re-enfranchisement and empowerment of Afro-descendant people.

Further leveraging the culture and education nexus could bolster educational integration of cultural heritage and the creative sector into national and regional policies and strategies, notably through multistakeholder and intersectoral approaches across the educational and cultural ecosystems towards empowering youth through culture and arts education, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship for inclusive and sustainable economies.

CCIs are recognized as an engine for sustainable economic growth and serve as a mechanism for diversifying economies, enhancing global competitiveness, and fostering youth employment and entrepreneurship in both regional and international markets. Through capacity building and advocacy, the sector can contribute to addressing youth unemployment, reducing youth migration, promoting economic diversification, fostering inclusivity, and reducing the gender equality gap by empowering women through gender transformative cultural policies

The integration of culture into disaster risk management and climate change strategies and mechanisms notably through leveraging traditional knowledge systems could inform climate policies, in light of the particular vulnerability of Caribbean SIDS to the escalating and adverse effects of natural hazards.

The transversal impact of the culture sector to other public policies could be further leveraged, including the digital transformation, notably in further developing digital literacy and access to digital and digitalized content, as well as in protecting creators by ensuring copyright, intellectual property protection, and fair remuneration.

A photograph of a musician with long dreadlocks, wearing a red jacket with yellow trim, playing a large, golden, spherical instrument (possibly a gong or a similar traditional instrument) on a stage. The instrument is mounted on a stand and has a microphone positioned above it. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and stage lights.

## Chapter III

# Cultural Policies in the AIS SIDS

Ministry of Culture and Creative Industries  
of Cabo Verde

**The SIDS (Small Island Developing States) located in the Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea comprise eight UNESCO Member States.** Spanning three oceans and seas, they exhibit significant diversity in topography, geography, size, as well as demographic and socio-economic indicators. The trajectory of these Nations has been profoundly influenced by migration and transcontinental trade routes, as well as by forced displacements stemming from a legacy of slavery and colonialism, particularly under Portuguese, British, and French dominion. The enduring impact of this historical backdrop, characterized by mobility and international interchange, has given rise to multicultural societies that unite various communities. Moreover, it has nurtured a comprehensive understanding of culture intertwined with other realms of development, notably environmental sustainability.

**Cultural and linguistic diversity stands out as a defining feature of these countries, deeply rooted in their tangible and intangible heritage.** This diversity encompasses a wide array of sites, ranging from historic cities like Cidade Velha in Cabo Verde, to cultural landscapes such as Le Morne in Mauritius and the Singapore Botanic Gardens, all of which hold prestigious positions as World Heritage sites, as well as the Roças de Monte Café, Agua-Izé e Sundy de São Tomé e Príncipe, currently on the World Heritage Tentative List. Given that they are by nature surrounded by sea, all African SIDS have underwater cultural heritage, such as shipwrecks. Their heritage also extends to encompass tangible heritage and cultural practices such as the Moutya dance of Seychelles, a legacy from the era of slavery inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, as well as the vibrant richness of creole languages. Moreover, the sustained connections with diasporas represent a crucial dimension of the cultural ecosystem, facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and contributing to the global dissemination of cultural expressions, thus enhancing their visibility worldwide.

**Over time, the cultural diversity within the AIS SIDS has fostered the emergence of CCIs as catalysts for development.** Consequently, culture is acknowledged as a substantial contributor to the renaissance of the African Continent, fostering sustainable economic growth and diversification, trade, and addressing pressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, and social disparities, particularly among youth. Culture holds significant value for well-being, shaping both individual and collective identities, fostering social cohesion, and facilitating the pursuit of sustainable development prospects in a holistic manner through its crosscutting impact across diverse policy areas.



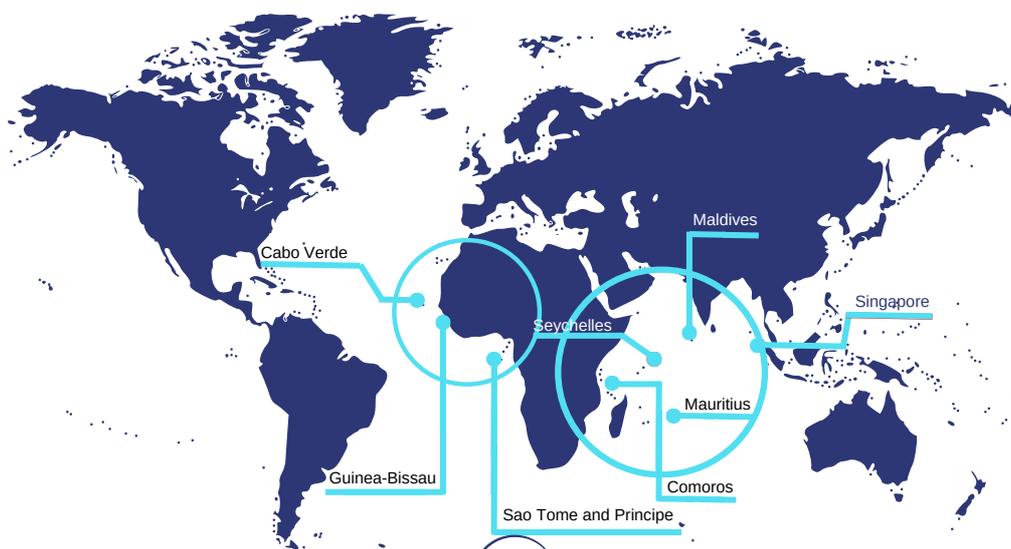
*Culture is transversal to all areas of life and society [...] It is a driver of social development and economic growth, not only for its practitioners but for the country itself.*

Aerton do Rosário Crisóstomo, former Minister of Tourism, Culture, Trade, and Industries, Sao Tome and Principe

**It is noteworthy that the cultural sector in AIS SIDS, albeit at varying levels, encounters common challenges akin to those experienced by all SIDS.** However, the geographic dispersion of AIS SIDS presents a distinct challenge, as it does not lend itself to sub-regional integration as observed in Pacific and Caribbean countries, which heavily rely on interregional organisations such as CARICOM and SPC for tailored regulatory frameworks, particularly in the realm of culture. Further hindrances impeding efforts to promote rapid cultural development in these countries include difficulties in accessing funding and regional markets inland, especially in Africa, as well as a lack of training opportunities and skilled professionals. Additionally, the prevalence of informality within the sector contributes to the absence of social protection for artists and inadequate systems for fair remuneration, including in online contexts.

**To tackle these challenges, governments have progressively allocated more resources to culture-related policies at the national level, driven by the growing recognition of culture as a driver and enabler of sustainable development.** There is also a growing acknowledgment of the need to establish strategic policies to stimulate investment, funding, and implementation mechanisms to support the sector's growth and intended impact. Promoting a multifaceted and multi-stakeholder approach engaging governments, regional and international cooperation, communities, and the private sector will also be crucial to unlock the full potential of the cultural sector in AIS SIDS.

**SIDS IN ATLANTIC, INDIAN OCEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA**



## The cultural policy landscape

### *Charting the course of cultural policies*

**Over the past decade, culture has steadily gained traction within national public policies, even though it often remains overshadowed by pressing development issues.** This reflects an increasing recognition of the economic potential of the cultural sector, along with its contribution to social cohesion and nation-building. The scope of cultural policies has progressively broadened from a focus solely on cultural heritage to encompass other dimensions of culture, such as creativity, cultural tourism, and digital technology, as exemplified by Singapore. Given the demographic youth bulge, particularly evident in Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tome and Principe, there is a growing interest in harnessing the potential of the creative sector and digital media, especially for addressing youth unemployment. Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry remains a significant economic driver for most of these countries, capitalizing on both their natural and cultural assets, on land and underwater.

**Culture has gradually become integrated into public policy, although at varying rates,** following the independence of countries between 1965 (Maldives) and 1978 (Seychelles). In certain countries, culture was prioritized early on at the constitutional level, as exemplified by the 1975 Constitution of São Tome and Principe, which enshrines access to culture and cultural participation as fundamental rights. Among these countries, five – Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Maldives, Mauritius, and Singapore – have established a ministry or general secretary dedicated to culture. In Comoros and Sao Tome and Principe, culture is encompassed within other ministries – education and sciences – while Seychelles has a National Institute of Culture, Heritage, and the Arts under the authority of the Head of State.

**Most countries have established cultural policy frameworks, although some of these frameworks have not been updated in recent years.** Comoros, Mauritius, São Tome and Principe and Seychelles have recently initiated revisions of their frameworks to align them with the contemporary policy landscape. This process will be crucial in the upcoming years to craft a comprehensive national vision for the sector and bolster its contribution to broader development endeavours. Overall, investment in cultural sector policy remains fluctuating in some of the more vulnerable countries, given the presence of competing development priorities such as health or education. Nonetheless, culture is gradually gaining prominence in national development plans, as evidenced by Guinea Bissau's Strategic and Operational Plan 2015-2020 'Terra Kanka' (2015), which advocates for culture as a pivotal driver for reconstruction and transformation.

### *Developing legal and normative frameworks for culture*

**The UNESCO Culture Conventions have spurred the development or revision of national legal frameworks in recent years,** indicating a recognition of culture as an increasingly prominent public policy priority. Over the past decade, the pace of ratification and implementation of UNESCO Culture Conventions has advanced in the AIS SIDS, reflecting heightened political commitment to supporting the cultural sector. Illustrating a historical emphasis on cultural heritage, all countries in the region have ratified the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention, as well as the UNESCO 2003 Convention. To translate the implementation of these conventions at the national level, five out of the eight countries have enacted laws on the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage, with Singapore being the most recent (in 2021). Additionally,

Comoros updated its legal framework, which dates back to 1994, expanding its scope to include intangible heritage and underwater heritage in 2020. Based on a Model Cultural Heritage Act, provided by UNESCO, other countries are working towards new laws.

**Countries across the sub-region are increasingly demonstrating interest in addressing the illicit trafficking of cultural goods and supporting the return and restitution of cultural property.** This endeavour is further bolstered in the African region by the active engagement of regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organisations, such as the AU, ECCAS or ECOWAS. Among other initiatives, in December 2021, the African Union Commission, in partnership with the Government of Senegal and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), organized the Continental Experts' Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage in Dakar. Preceded by a Regional Economic Community (RECs) Consultation, the workshop aimed to develop a Common African Position Paper and Framework for Action on the Return/Restitution of Illicitly Trafficked Cultural Property. At the national level, while Mauritius and Seychelles had ratified the UNESCO 1970 Convention earlier (in 1978 and 2004, respectively), this greater political commitment is evidenced by the more recent ratification by Comoros in 2021. In order to be fully effective, the Convention must be universally ratified to protect national movable cultural properties. In this regard, awareness-raising and training activities aimed at countries which did not ratify yet the UNESCO 1970 Convention should be implemented. In this regard, UNESCO launched its Flagship Programme "Fostering Cultural Heritage and Capacity Development" (2022-2029) which aims to strengthen the legal protection of cultural heritage at the national, regional, and international levels, the preservation of African museum collections and reinforcement of capacities, as well as to assist African Member States in the elaboration and follow-up of return and restitution requests of cultural property. African SIDS countries are fully integrated in this major pluriannual initiative.

**To ensure a stronger national and regional response, UNESCO will upscale its efforts to promote the ratification of these key instruments in SIDS,** as well as reinforce local expertise for the development and strengthened implementation of national legal frameworks to counter illegal trafficking based on a harmonised model law that can be adapted to regional and local needs, and establish a SIDS network to provide support through peer-to-peer learning, with the involvement of women professionals and experts. Additionally, countries such as Comoros, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe and Seychelles have already engaged in regional capacity-building workshops organized by UNESCO in December 2022 that aim at ensuring universal ratification of the UNESCO 1970 Convention by 2029. On the same occasion, the country signed the Libreville Declaration on illicit trafficking of cultural goods, alongside with 7 other States of Central Africa. Furthermore, many of the small island States show also a strong interest in the protection and research of their underwater cultural heritage. Thus African SIDS sent their trainees in January and May 2024 to UNESCO Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) trainings in Mozambique and Turkey. More capacity building and employment in this area is however needed, especially also to foster responsible bio-cultural tourism and the inclusion of UCH in Marine Protected Areas.



The growing aspiration to harness the potential of the cultural sector has prompted the development of more comprehensive policy frameworks in recent years, which also encompass CCIs. Four AIS SIDS ratified the UNESCO 2005 Convention between 2006 and 2021, further enhancing the recognition of culture as a distinct public policy domain. Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Singapore have enacted laws related to copyrights and/or artist status, indicating a growing commitment to the creative economy. Additionally, Comoros is in the process of developing specific legislation in this area. It is also worth mentioning that São Tome and Principe committed to ratify the UNESCO 2005 Convention by 2025. Although not a signatory to the Convention, Singapore has been at the forefront of driving the creative economy through technology, innovation, tourism, arts, and design. As a UNESCO Creative City of Design since 2015, Singapore has notably introduced the 'Good Design Research' initiative in 2020, encouraging design practitioners to establish new systems and processes that are more sustainable and resilient against external shocks, including COVID-19. With the support of the UNESCO Aschberg programme, Seychelles is currently upscaling its efforts towards the development of a status of the artist law. Based on the results of the consultative process, a baseline study will be drafted on the status of the artist, including a gap analysis in terms of legislation regarding the socio-economic protection of artists, and provide recommendations for the design or reform of regulatory texts relating to the protection of artists and cultural professionals.

Cabo Verde,  
Mauritius, Seychelles,  
and Singapore have  
enacted laws related to  
copyrights or artist  
status



Ministry of Culture and  
Creative Industries of Cabo Verde

**The upward trajectory of cultural policies in AIS SIDS is faced with challenges, as countries often struggle to match the ambitions of adopted texts with effective implementation.** While developed policy and legal frameworks exist, there is often a lack of awareness-raising campaigns to inform and sensitize citizens and key stakeholders – particularly civil society and the private sector – who play proactive roles across the broad culture spectrum. Moreover, it is common to observe that local or national institutions responsible for implementing necessary measures lack the financial and technical capacities to do so effectively. For example, Comoros has yet to establish the National Commission for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, as mandated by the revised 2020 law on the protection of national cultural heritage. Similarly, São Tome and Príncipe, with UNESCO's support, is revising its cultural policy charter from 2011 due to implementation challenges rendering it outdated. The revised charter is expected to include an action plan to prevent such occurrences in the future.

### ***Expanding sub-regional cooperation***

**The commitment of AIS SIDS towards the cultural sector is supported by several regional processes, although no unified mechanism is in place** bringing together these countries, due to their geographical disparateness, which often lead to a sense of isolation. Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles, for example, are part of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), which has developed a Strategic Development Plan (2018-2021) in which culture and tourism are particularly emphasized, alongside environmental and social priorities. At the continental level, the African Union strongly featured culture in its regional development plan, the 2063 Agenda – notably through its Aspiration 5 which aims at a strong African cultural identity, a common heritage, and shared values and ethics. The First-ten Year Implementation Plan – FTYIP (2014-2023) provided countries with an ambitious framework to advance and assess progress towards the identified goals. Additionally, the Organisation is also expanding specific cooperation platforms targeting African SIDS, particularly in the area of fisheries and aquaculture, to support a sub-regional cooperation mechanism which could eventually encompass issues related to culture and heritage, including underwater cultural heritage. These initiatives align with critical priorities identified by the countries, such as youth employment and climate action, the latter also seen in relation to the impact of sea level rise on cultural sites in territorial waters and on the coast.

**In a broader context, the AU African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could also play a pivotal role to address the specific challenges encountered by African SIDS by establishing a continental single market for goods, services, and investment.** This initiative aims to dismantle geographical, logistical, and regulatory barriers to trade and investment while enhancing productive capabilities. To fully leverage the potential of AfCFTA in creating opportunities to boost intra-African trade and integrate SIDS into the continental economy, the AU emphasizes the importance of investing in domestic reforms across various sectors, including culture. According to the Future Report: Making the AfCFTA work, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) – many of which are led by women and youth – are central to economic growth across the continent, constituting approximately 80 percent of all businesses. African youth are 1.6 times more likely to engage in entrepreneurship. The report further indicates that youth comprise the majority of the labour force in service sectors such as heritage, culture, music, fashion, design, and digital innovations. Hence, it is imperative to provide tailored support and policy frameworks for culture-related MSMEs to overcome low productivity, leverage economies of scale, and utilize the continental market as a springboard for expansion into regional and international markets.

African youth are  
**1.6 times**  
more likely to engage  
in entrepreneurship

AfCTA/UNDP, 2020



## Culture and sustainable development: an overview

### *Harnessing cultural heritage for sustainable development*

**The early interest towards safeguarding cultural heritage has opened up opportunities to connect culture and sustainable development through various lenses.** Efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, to tackle illicit trafficking of cultural property, to promote sustainable urbanization and tourism in fragile environments, and stimulate resilience, social inclusion, and poverty alleviation are increasingly integrated into heritage safeguarding strategies, particularly concerning World Heritage sites, museums, as well as underwater and coastal cultural heritage. Cabo Verde, Mauritius, and Seychelles have amassed considerable expertise in conserving World Heritage sites, which significantly contribute to their respective tourism sector, albeit the insufficient intersection and synergies between tourism development, the preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites – including marine and underwater sites – as well as museums, and the development of a culture and crafts-related creative sector. Meanwhile, there is a growing interest from Comoros, Guinea Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe to further strengthen their engagement as part of the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention, by also focusing on their natural sites, cultural landscape as well as nature and cultural linkages, such as the proposed inscription of the Bijagos archipelagos in Guinea-Bissau. In addition, there is a necessity to work more on urban sites including through the implementation of the UNESCO 2011 Recommendation concerning the Historic Urban Landscape to support sustainable conservation, effective management and promotion of the sites in these islands, as reflected by the ongoing work on the historic sultanate of Comoros and the roças de Monte Café, Agua-Izé e Sundy de São Tomé e Príncipe. UNESCO, with support from partners like Japan and Saudi Arabia, is currently providing capacity-building assistance for the development of indicative lists and the finalization of nomination dossiers.

**In addition to World Heritage, intangible cultural heritage is increasingly integrated into sustainability strategies.** Living heritage is becoming a key component of development strategies, serving as a catalyst for social cohesion in diverse societies, supporting education and learning initiatives, and diversifying economic opportunities. The Morna musical tradition of Cabo Verde, inscribed on the Representative List of the UNESCO 2003 Convention in 2019, exemplifies how such living heritage fosters social cohesion, particularly when performed in Cape

Cape Verdean Creole. In the same line, Sao Tome and Principe has finalized its inventory on Tchiloli in preparation for its inscription on the Representative List and submitted a dossier in March 2024. Interest in underwater cultural heritage is also growing, although only Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau have ratified the UNESCO 2001 Convention thus far. This interest presents opportunities for education, training, and research, while also revitalizing tourism prospects and fostering partnerships. Cabo Verde's involvement in the Margullar II regional project on Underwater Archaeological Heritage and Tourism in Macaronesia is noteworthy. This initiative aimed to introduce professionals, students in cultural heritage, and maritime/port service agents to underwater archaeology, enhancing their capacity to safeguard underwater heritage. Additionally, the project aimed to integrate heritage and tourism by conducting explorations to map and preserve marine heritage, thereby enhancing its appeal for sustainable tourism activities.

### ***Ensuring equal access to culture for social inclusion***

**Ensuring equal access to culture remains a challenge across the sub-region, particularly due to archipelagic geographical structures**, the concentration of cultural resources in capital cities, and varying levels of decentralization in cultural policies. While all countries have national cultural institutions such as archives or museums, many are outdated, with irregular updates to exhibitions and inventories or a lack of national legislation and regulation. Nonetheless, most countries have established networks of local youth or community centres, providing spaces for cultural access and participation. Building on these existing ecosystems, multi-stakeholder partnerships involving CSOs, the private sector, and public authorities offer avenues to support social inclusion and equitable representation in policy design and implementation, particularly targeting women, youth, and Indigenous communities. For example, Cabo Verde instituted the 'Access to Culture' Scholarship Programme (Bolsa de Acesso à Cultura) as an active financing policy to aid schools and culture and arts-related associations and NGOs in promoting social inclusion through the arts. Aimed mainly at citizens with fewer financial resources, the country provided financial assistance to 45 schools in the municipalities of Praia and Cidade Velha on the Island of Santiago in 2024, granting 1,748 students, including 940 girls and 808 boys, free access to art classes. Notably, in its seven-year existence, the programme has benefited 112 schools across the country, totalling over four thousand students on the aforementioned island, with a total funding of 30 million Cabo Verde Escudos (293,000 USD). Furthermore, an issue is also the access to underwater cultural heritage, which is yet to low and needs capacities. No UNESCO Best Practice Initiative has yet been designated in an African SIDS, while they are encompassing some of the countries that are the richest in UCH.

**In another realm, the digital transformation also opens up new opportunities for the cultural sector, although the digital divide remains an enduring challenge.** Despite increased access to internet across the region – with between 75% and 90% of households equipped with a mobile phone (ITU, 2019) – and robust infrastructure in some countries such as Mauritius and Seychelles, connectivity remains uneven at the territorial level and often costly, particularly outside capital cities. However, there are examples of efforts to harness the potential of digital technologies. Faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore embraced new technologies to safeguard and promote culture. For instance, the National Heritage Board (NHB) enhanced the accessibility of cultural heritage through digital means. Singapore also developed an Arts and Culture digital roadmap, providing cultural organizers with digital solutions, alongside a digital toolkit and funding support. In Seychelles, the National Institute of Culture Heritage & the Arts is creating online content in Creole to promote linguistic diversity, facilitate learning, and encourage social inclusion.



Between **75%** and **90%** of households in the region are equipped with a mobile phone

ITU, 2019

## Looking ahead: opportunities for policy engagement

### *Integrating culture into curricula and vocational training*

**A strong aspiration is expressed by countries of the region to expand content- and context-relevant education through culture.** This is particularly exemplified by a more systemic inclusion in curricula of local and national cultural content, such as national literature, as well as creole languages – in addition to national languages such as English, French or Portuguese – following the examples of Sao Tome and Principe and Mauritius which have experimented with this strategy. To address gaps in terms of culture and arts education within formal education systems, Sao Tomé and Principe has recently undertaken a reform bringing culture and education under the same ministry, with a view to strengthening synergies between programmes in the two sectors. Likewise, several initiatives are supported by CSOs or the private sector. Examples include the Tche-Za hip hop company in Comoros and the Tiniguena NGO in Guinea-Bissau, which aims to contribute to the sustainable management of resources and knowledge on biodiversity and cultural heritage through education to enhance food security. Similarly, Singapore is dedicated to leveraging synergies between culture and education for human and societal development. This commitment is evident in the country's efforts to integrate culture and the arts into school pedagogy and curricula, as well as aligning with the UNESCO Seoul Agenda: Goals for Development of Arts Education in relevant national strategies, policies, and approaches. These endeavours offer promising prospects for implementing the recently adopted UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education. Another prospect to support culture and arts education is the Cultural Ocean Literacy, which takes a bio-cultural approach and teaches ocean preservation based on cultural heritage.

**Supporting the professionalization of the cultural sector across its various domains to enhance the creative economy is another significant prospect.** It is estimated that the creative economy account for 3.1% of global GDP and 6.2% of all employment (UNESCO, 2021). While countries like Cabo Verde, Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius, Singapore, and Seychelles offer higher education opportunities in culture and the arts, development across different domains remains uneven. Investing in upgrading technical skills in specific subsectors, such as sound or lighting, could create job opportunities. Similarly, higher education in cultural or tourism management lacks adequate development and structure, impeding the professionalization of the cultural sector. Notable existing programmes include a Bachelor's degree in cultural heritage management offered by the University of Cabo Verde and tourism management programmes available at universities in the Maldives and Mauritius.

## Tackling structural challenges through multistakeholder cooperation

**The potential of the creative sector to support employment, poverty alleviation and social inclusion is increasingly recognized.** The cultural and creative sectors account for a growing segment of national economies, also further contributing to the international influence of some countries, for example, music in Cabo Verde, Tchiloli in São Tome and Principe, or literature in Comoros. The cultural and creative sector is also a significant driver for employment, particularly for the youth. For instance, according to The [African film Industry: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth report](#), the film and audiovisual sectors account for US\$5 billion in revenues in Africa and employ 5 million professionals, including a substantial number of young people. The same source further estimates that these sectors have the potential to create over 20 million jobs and generate US\$20 billion in revenues annually on the continent. To capitalize on these opportunities offered by the sector, SIDS countries will need to invest more in the transformative power of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including regional cooperation and public-private partnerships.



The film and audiovisual sectors account for  
**US\$5 billion**  
in revenues in Africa and  
employ  
**5 million**  
professionals

UNESCO  
2021

Indeed, strengthened regional cooperation will be key to supporting the cultural and creative sectors, which offer a broad range of opportunities across the region for job creation and revenue generation, particularly for youth and women. Depending on the sub-sector, some countries are more advanced and better structured than others. Therefore, there would be high value for AIS SIDS in placing stronger emphasis on networking and collaborative relationships for mutual reinforcement. African heritage-based textiles play a prominent role in both everyday life and ceremonial attire across nearly all countries in the region, as outlined in the UNESCO report on the [African Fashion Sector: Trends, Challenges & Opportunities for Growth](#). Even though small-scale artisanal manufacturing often receives inadequate policy attention and is not properly aligned with larger-scale production across the continent, Mauritius successfully integrated its garment production into global value chains from the 1980s. In 2020, textile and garment exports from Mauritius amounted to 518,685,630 USD, while imports were valued at 308,282,170 USD. In this context, countries such as Cabo Verde, Comoros, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Seychelles, which predominantly rely on garment imports, may find opportunities for cooperation to develop their own local production. Similarly, there are prospects for further exchange and community building based on existing networks such as the UNESCO Creative Cities, including those focused on Design (e.g., Singapore) or Music (e.g., Bissau, Port Louis, and Praia).



National Heritage Fund\*  
Traditional Mauritian Segga (Mauritius)  
Inscribed in 2014 on the Representative List of the  
Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity  
A performance which demonstrates improvisation  
with respect to instruments  
Photograph: Nipon Medhi

**The dynamism of the creative sector is largely driven by CSOs and the private sector, and these efforts should be further promoted.** For example, the Centre for Artistic and Cultural Creation of Comoros (CCAC Mavuna) supports arts creation through equipment and training, fosters artists mobility, and also advocates on intellectual property issues. Private sector initiatives include the N’GOLÁ Biennale of Arts and Culture in São Tome and Principe which, for its latest edition, mobilized more than 30 artists from all parts of the continent and its diaspora, as well as the local community. The Biennale also engaged some thirty weavers from the community of Neves in a tapestry project, Água Grande, which aimed to artistically represent Sao Tomé and Príncipe through its fauna and flora.



*We need to design a new model of cultural governance that puts creators at the centre, that places action and impact as the only reliable metrics for assessing the success or failure of governments and multilateral institutions. It is essential to involve the local and national creative and entrepreneurial community. It is essential to create regional projects and synergies, to define knowledge on mechanisms for the valorization and monetization of intellectual property. There are no cultural and creative industries without due respect for intellectual property and copyright.”*

Abraão Aníbal Fernandes Barbosa Vicente, Minister for Culture and Creative Industries – Cabo Verde, at MONDIACULT 2022 Conference

**Efforts should be sustained to further harness the potential of the creative sector and markets, particularly through strengthened national policy frameworks,** in a context where informality remains predominant. The socio-economic conditions of artists and cultural professionals – including fair remuneration, recognized status and social protection – remain fragile in most counties. Addressing their vulnerability, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, requires more robust, dedicated policies and incentives. International mobility is equally challenging and is an issue which could also be addressed through strengthened sub-regional cooperation with a view to expanding creative markets. In that perspective, countries like Seychelles have already made steps forward, as illustrated by several recent initiatives. Among them, the National Institute of Culture Heritage & the Arts proposes tax incentives for cultural and creative operators, promotes mobility of artists, and supports women’s participation in cultural life. Likewise, partnerships with social media platforms have been developed, with the support of the government and local banks, with a view to enable fair online remuneration of artists, thus encouraging the creation and dissemination of culture.

### **Leveraging sustainable tourism for culture**

**Tourism is a strong contributor to the economy – particularly to the blue economy – and international visibility of most of the AIS SIDS,** and is a sector that was particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2019 and 2021, for example, the share of GDP of the tourism sector dropped from 53.5% to 44.6% in Maldives, and from 37.8% to less than 13.5% in Cabo Verde (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022). While beaches and coastal resources remain a core driver of the tourism industry, culture, across its different components, is equally harnessed

to brand tourism destinations, from built cultural heritage in Praia, Cabo Verde, to cultural events such as the Kreol Festival in Seychelles or thriving creative scenes like Mauritius' Artspace and Tamarin Arts Centre.

**Despite its disruptive impact, the pandemic also accelerated a transition toward more sustainable tourism patterns,** exposing the negative impact of mass tourism on the environment and livelihoods, while also highlighting the need for economic diversification, including within the tourism sector itself. Such a transition toward more sustainable, locally owned business models should be further promoted in the future, notably to support the engagement of local communities in cultural tourism, amplify the impact on their livelihoods, and foster their broader engagement in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. Public access to underwater cultural heritage, for instance, has the potential to demonstrate positive effects on local economies, holding great appeal for the cultural tourism sector, particularly for activities such as diving. However, to ensure that such practices do not lead to detrimental consequences on underwater cultural heritage, it is crucial to raise awareness and educate communities. By actively engaging the latter in the protection of this type of heritage, they become not only its guardians but also contributors to sustainable development. Heritage, therefore, presents an opportunity to propose a sustainable tourism development model rooted in local cultural values that brings about economic returns to the local authorities and communities. Moreover, in this particular case, such a model would also serve as an effective means of regulating port activity, which has experienced rapid growth in recent decades and often posed a threat to the conservation of underwater cultural heritage.

**Further systemic linkages between tourism and culture should be explored, including by mobilizing expertise from universities and CSOs,** with a view to leverage cultural tourism for climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, sustainable urban development or poverty alleviation. Efforts should be also undertaken to promote more people-centred practices, such as the programme developed by the Heritage and Culture Education Services of Seychelles in Mahe Island, aimed at connecting international visitors with local elderly people around local gastronomy, and also facilitating intergenerational exchange. The access to, and knowledge about, underwater cultural heritage and linked intangible heritage needs shall also be enhanced by capacity building and the training of teachers.



*Each of our Countries have a unique and yet very rich culture. At the same time, for SIDS, the technical know-how and expertise is lacking and has to be consolidated. So far, the tremendous support of UNESCO has helped in properly implementing our large-scale projects. However today we are challenged by the trade-off between development and culture, and I personally believe they should be mutually beneficial. [...] We have our own constraints and limitations. Despite our best intentions to align ourselves with international cultural policies, it remains difficult for us to put in practice the above, taking into account our limited resources. Therefore a special consideration by UNESCO to SIDS is warranted.*

Avinash Teeluck, Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage of Mauritius  
MONDIACULT 2022 Conference

# Highlights

While culture has gained traction in public policies, efforts should be sustained to strengthen and adapt cultural policy and legal frameworks, while also ensuring effective implementation as well as developing monitoring systems on the impact of culture on national development to further support policy investment as well as anchor culture within the broader public policy landscape.

Efforts in the professionalization of the sector through capacity building, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are visible, particularly in cultural and heritage management, as well as in specific domains of the creative industries. Additionally, academic research in heritage and cultural studies needs to be fostered at the national university level to further enhance knowledge and expertise in these areas.

Expanding access to finance and supporting regional partnerships – including through strengthened networking of AIS SIDS and more targeted support of regional organizations – will be paramount to harness the transformative power of culture across other policy areas, such as education, tourism, social inclusion, marine and cultural sciences, climate action, and disaster risk management among others.

Equal and inclusive access to culture and heritage are supported by a strengthened participation of communities and populations in policymaking processes, supporting the development of local cultural infrastructures – both on-site and online – as well as supporting CSOs dedicated to culture; while further investment is needed towards fostering community-driven partnerships with national and local public and private stakeholders, as well as international organizations such as UNESCO and regional ones such as the African Union.

While countries are gradually investing in the cultural and creative sectors – whose economic impact is increasingly acknowledged – efforts should be sustained to provide an enabling policy environment, including by strengthening the status of the artist, providing incentives to encourage a diverse range of artistic expressions, and enabling the adaptation to the digital transformation, including as regards fair remuneration and intellectual property.

# Looking Ahead



*Small island States do not lack ambition, they lack finance. [...] Most small island States are middle-income countries. We need to move past a system that allocates concessional finance depending on national income, to one that considers vulnerability and resilience. [The Fourth International] Conference on Small Island Developing States in Antigua and Barbuda will be an opportunity to bring the international community together around the challenges you face. With global action for climate justice and financial justice, we can create the change you need.*

UN Secretary-General António Guterres' message  
to the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), September 2023



## **Culture is a growing area of public policy investment for SIDS across all three sub-regions.**

The safeguarding and promotion of cultural diversity is a common aspiration across SIDS' cultural policies, reflecting societies which have been shaped by mobility and intercultural exchanges, and marked by the multifaceted contribution of indigenous communities across the three sub-regions. The historical pathways of cultural policies across SIDS are deeply intertwined with issues of social justice, emancipation and nation-building, particularly in relation to the legacy of slavery or the colonial era. The scope of national policies has gradually expanded, encompassing not only cultural heritage, but also to a growing extent museums, the creative economy and cultural tourism. Ensuring equal access to culture is a major issue, particularly in view of specific issues such as remoteness, urban-rural divide or digital divide. While most SIDS now have well-established ministries of culture, strengthening cultural institutions and infrastructure, as well as supporting cross-sectoral policy implementation remains critical. Evolving funding mechanisms for the cultural sector is equally crucial, including through enhanced partnerships with civil society and private stakeholders. The growing ratification of UNESCO Culture Conventions by SIDS, despite disparities across the sub-regions, has been instrumental in strengthening cultural policies. A growing number of countries are now developing or updating their national cultural policy frameworks, including in relation to sustainable development issues such as social inclusion, education, urban sustainability, climate action or economic diversification – while some of them are gradually investing in monitoring and data collection. While countries are increasingly engaging in community-based and participatory governance, such mechanisms should be expanded and sustained. Looking forward, strengthening policy advice on the development and strengthening of cultural policies, further investing in cultural data and indicators, as well as strengthening capacity building schemes are essential prospects which should be supported by UNESCO, regional organizations and other international organizations.

**Regional cooperation is a critical leeway to support the development and strengthening of cultural policies for SIDS.** While the Caribbean and Pacific sub-regions already benefit from a strong regional integration, allowing to address SIDS-specific issues, AIS SIDS would also gain from amplified networking opportunities, a perspective which could be further supported by regional and sub-regional organizations from the Africa region, including the African Union or sub-regional economic commissions. Regional organizations such as CARICOM and SPC have been instrumental in developing cultural policy frameworks, enhancing capacity building, supporting knowledge exchange and the dissemination of good practices, or serving as policy dialogue platforms, thus supporting the mainstreaming of culture across public policies. More systemic collaboration between regional organizations, UNESCO and other relevant international organizations would be needed to strengthen policy design and implementation at country level.

**Culture is considered as an important avenue for economic diversification – a critical prospect for SIDS in view of their specific vulnerability** stemming from small size, remoteness, and susceptibility to external shocks. In particular, cultural and creative industries on the one hand, and cultural tourism on the other hand, are considered by policymakers as high potential areas to prompt economic diversification, as drivers of employment and inclusive growth, especially benefiting youth and women, while also fostering locally driven and endogenous development pathways. The creative economy has received growing policy interest over the past decade across all three sub-regions and is increasingly encompassed in public policy schemes. The cultural and creative sectors – encompassing music, festivals, carnivals, performing arts, gastronomy, arts and crafts, design, fashion, among others – are seen as job-intensive industries, building on talent and creativity to sustain national economies, while also supporting SIDS' integration into regional and international markets, particularly within the digital economy. Likewise, SIDS countries are strongly engaged in carving sustainable cultural tourism in a context where tourism represents a significant share of the economy for most of the countries and was massively disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, urging to move away from mass tourism models. Enabling community-based cultural tourism, supporting the diversification of cultural products and experience, or addressing the risks of commodification of culture, are critical endeavors. Overall, fostering an environment that favors culture-based economic diversification – across the cultural industries and cultural tourism domains – requires bold public policy investment and cross sectoral policies, notably across the culture, tourism, trade and digital domains.

**SIDS have taken a pioneering role in harnessing culture and Indigenous knowledge for climate action and resilience, also informing the global climate conversation.** Islands' exposure to the effects of climate change and disasters strongly impacts upon cultural heritage across all sub-regions, while also jeopardizing the transmission of cultural practices. Meanwhile, Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems have long provided communities resilience and adaptation, leading to SIDS across all sub-regions taking the lead on harnessing culture for disaster risk management, food security, land or water use, or biodiversity protection among other areas. While such wealth of knowledge is undisputedly recognized, its integration in public policy frameworks – including climate policies – although gradually gaining traction, remains insufficient. Looking forward, SIDS perspectives and specific experience on climate change shall inform meaningfully the global climate conversation, particularly in the framework of the COP process, including as regards the ongoing discussion on climate justice and compensating loss and damage – an area in which culture is increasingly being profiled.

**The protection of cultural rights, including in the digital realm, is an overarching area of conversation for SIDS across all regions, albeit with sub-regional specificities.** Addressing issues related with fair remuneration, the discoverability of diverse cultural and linguistic content, as well as the monetization of culture in the digital environment is paramount, particularly in view of the digital divide, notably in terms of internet access and digital literacy, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. More broadly, strengthening the status of artist and cultural professionals is an area where several SIDS have made significant progress over the past years with dedicated policy development. Peer-to-peer learning across countries and enhanced capacity building could further support such efforts. The importance to strengthen intellectual property and copyright frameworks is unanimously underlined, including in relation to Indigenous and traditional knowledge and collective rights – an area which could be further supported by UNESCO, regional organizations and other relevant international organizations. Likewise, reclaiming historical memories, speaking notably to the legacy of slavery and people of African Descent in the Caribbean, as well as the dialogue on the restitution of cultural property across the regions continue to fuel the public debate.

**Finally, strengthening the linkages between education and culture is a growing area of engagement, echoing SIDS' specific priorities and areas of concern.** Building on the aspiration to reclaim historical memory and acknowledge the plurality of identities – especially as regards Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities – a growing interest is expressed towards integrating culture into education – in formal, non-formal and informal settings. A number of SIDS have already taken steps in integrating local and national cultural elements into education curricula – a process which could be further expanded in the future. Likewise, museums and cultural institutions are playing a growing educational role across the regions in shaping the complex historical narratives of the islands and their peoples. Overall, cultural and educational policies must acknowledge the diverse identities and histories of SIDS, including in relation with the legacy of the colonial era and slavery. In view of the brain drain affecting a majority of SIDS, investing in education is also vital to nurture skills for the cultural and creative sectors, train a new generation of cultural professionals and foster their access to regional and international markets, including through enhanced linkages with a vast SIDS diaspora. Major efforts were engaged in that direction across all regions, particularly as part of sub-regional programmes, and should be further sustained in the future at national level. In this perspective, the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education, adopted in February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, opens up new prospects to invigorate policy investment in culture and arts education sustaining creativity in the SIDS alongside with the strengthening of skilled labour.

**Looking forward, SIDS aspire to contribute meaningfully to the global policy dialogue on culture and sustainable development, in the follow-up to the UNESCO MONDIACULT Conference, and in view of the adoption of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) 2024-2034 at the forthcoming SIDS 4 Conference, planned to take place in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024. SIDS are engaged in carving context-relevant development pathways, connection their priorities to the multilateral dialogue towards harnessing culture for a more sustainable and inclusive world.**



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## **Mapping Cultural Policies in Small Island Developing States**

This study underlines SIDS specific needs and priorities as regard to cultural policies, shedding light on areas of policy investment, to inform future capacity and knowledge building, policy advice, and advocacy by UNESCO and its regional and sub-regional partner organisations. The aim is to foster an enhanced support to the SIDS for the adaptation of their cultural policies to sustainable development challenges.



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